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# Closer to the Heart: An Exploration of Caring and Creative Visual Arts Classrooms

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CLOSER TO THE HEART: AN EXPLORATION OF CARING AND CREATIVE  
VISUAL ARTS CLASSROOMS

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Juli B. Kramer

June 2010

Advisor: P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D.

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Title: CLOSER TO THE HEART: AN EXPLORATION OF CARING AND  
CREATIVE VISUAL ARTS CLASSROOMS

Advisor: P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D.

Degree Date: June 2010

### **Abstract**

This study demonstrates how caring and creative secondary level visual arts classes facilitate the development of learning environments that enliven and expect the best of students; help them develop as autonomous and creative learners; provide them opportunities to care for others and the world around them; and keep them connected to their schools and education. It highlights how the intentions and operations of teachers impact student learning, creative risk taking, and interpersonal relations within and beyond the classroom. It also uncovers novel ways of thinking about arts education as a means to enhance positive individual and social development and vividly illustrates the conceptual frameworks and pedagogical methods used to do so. Four questions initiated the study: 1) What are the intentions of visual arts teachers who state that they believe creative and caring environments are essential for arts instruction and students' holistic development? 2) How are these intentions realized (or not realized) in their practice? 3) How does the enacted curriculum affect students' willingness to take creative risks? and 4) How do the intentions and practices of the teacher impact student self-concepts?

Six teachers in three Colorado and three Western Australian schools participated in the study, hosting classroom observations for between five and 10 days at each site. The teachers, as well as 25 students (three to five per teacher), participated in semi-structured interviews in addition to the observations. The students also completed photo essays that reflected what their visual arts experiences meant for them within and beyond

the classroom. The use of educational criticism and connoisseurship and the photo essays yielded vivid descriptions. These in turn facilitated the development of interpretations, thematics, and evaluations that inform our understanding and enhance our ability to help students within visual arts and other content area classrooms. The theoretical and methodological choices guiding the study moved existing work in new directions. Theoretically the study drew heavily upon Nel Noddings' care theory but explicitly expanded her ideas to include key elements of care theory for culturally diverse learners. The addition of photo essays was based on recent support for having participants utilize metaphor through photographic images to more effectively express their feelings, beliefs, and interpretations; the application of this method tremendously enhanced the findings.

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caring and creative visual arts classes can do for students grew out of our own work using the visual arts as a means for holistic development. My work with Ellen Spangler and all of the fantastic master teachers at the Denver Art Museum profoundly shaped my understanding of creativity and influenced my work as well.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and Overview**

*And the men who hold high places must be the ones to start, to mould a new reality closer to the heart. The blacksmith and the artist reflect it in their art; forge their creativity closer to the heart. Philosophers and ploughmen each must know his part, to sow a new mentality closer to the heart. (Peart & Talbot, 1977)*

For years, profits and the bottom line have reigned uncontested over the individual, most powerfully demonstrated by the financial crisis that began in 2009. Continuing unequal distribution of wealth to the top 5% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), rising numbers of people in prison and the children they leave behind (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007), employment and retirement insecurity (Committee on Education & Labor, 2008), lack of health insurance (Hadley, 2006), and relentless indicators that people's only value is as consumers (DeAngelis, 2004) are but a sample of negative factors abounding in our society.

Education is a microcosm of this larger picture. The bottom line or "profits" (high test scores) approach to education has often left people within and outside of education hopeless, searching for a voice. One step in attending to this sense of hopelessness is to take "an ethical stand about the purpose and meaning of public education and its crucial role in educating students to participate in an inclusive democracy" (Giroux, 2006, p. 50). Dewey grappled with this issue when exploring the role of morals in education and held that "so far as education is conducted unconsciously or consciously [to prepare the child for a fixed station in life], it results in fitting the future citizen for no station in life, but makes him a drone, a hanger-on, or an actual retarding influence in forward movement"

(Dewey, 1909, p. 11). The current state of much of public education in the U.S. lends itself to treating children and teens like drones and encourages a system where “the weaker gradually lose their sense of power, and accept a position of continuous and persistent inferiority...and the strong learn to glory, not in their strength, but in the fact that they are stronger” (p. 24). Weaker children find themselves robbed of hope, of the “foundation for enabling human beings to learn about their potential as moral and civic agents” (Giroux, 2006, p. 37). An educational system that stresses economic security and worth, above all else, fuels this sense of hopelessness, as does the failure of the system to prioritize the development of student happiness in all of its complexity (Noddings, 2003). Increased drop-out (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007), suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008), crime (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007), and drug use rates among youth, as well as swelling numbers of obese and medicated youth (Weisz, 2004) are symptoms of hopelessness and children failing to “learn about their potential.” Children are suffering and need adults to listen to and help them work towards a better life; to do so, education needs to move “*closer to the heart.*”

A current of change exists within education. Researchers, policy makers, and others are building strong bodies of evidence which suggest that students must be engaged holistically to thrive. The voices of experts in business (Florida, 2002; Hanna, 2008; Pink, 2006; Reynolds, 2008; Robinson, 2001), education (Noddings, 2003; Winner & Hetland, 2003) , technology (Tapscott & Williams, 2008), the arts (Gude, 2010; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005; Zimmerman, 2010), healthcare and mental health (Miller, Gilman, & Martens, 2008), etc. sound out warnings against simply teaching students

from the “neck up” (Robinson, 2006) and advocate teaching to enhance creativity and care for self and others. The arts lend themselves to this type of learning and several studies explore, or are exploring, this connection in greater depth (Barnes & Shirley, 2007; Ruggiero, 2005; Seidel, Winner, Hetland, & Tishman, 2008; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). Change will require mass collaboration, however, making multiple studies, from varied perspectives, presented in diverse forums essential.

### **Significance of the Study**

How does a study on creative and caring visual arts classes teach us how to help students embody the change we wish to see in the world? How does it facilitate our ability to fashion learning environments that: 1) enliven and expect the best of students; 2) help them develop as autonomous and creative learners; 3) provide them opportunities to care for others and the world around them; and 4) keep them connected to their schools and education? I offer four ways in which my study informs our understanding and enhances our ability to help students within visual arts and other content area classrooms.

#### **How to nurture creativity.**

Firstly, as you will see in the review of the literature on creativity in Chapter Two, experts tout the importance of environments that nurture creativity and describe actions teachers can take to fashion them (Sternberg, 2003). Although they talk about interpersonal relationships and experiences that enhance creativity, they fail to address *how* to build these relationships to ensure that students feel safe to take risks, make mistakes, and develop their creative potential. My study adds the dimension of care theory to closely examine what exactly is happening in the classroom relationally,



including how teacher intentions and actions, as well as interpersonal relationships within and outside of the classroom, influence students. I also focus on the importance of the aesthetic environment and the use of time and space within that environment to further enhance creative exploration and development. As a result, one sees a fine-grained picture of how to support student creativity.

**How to nurture student holistic and positive self-concept development.**

Secondly, in addition to establishing that caring environments help students feel safe to take creative risks, my study demonstrates that a caring environment positively affects student holistic and self-concept development. The concept of “holistic development” draws from Dewey’s (1909) notion that “the child is an organic whole, intellectually, socially, and morally, as well as physically” (p. 9). This idea posits that students do not operate as isolated entities separated from their physical knowledge (Robinson, 2001) but rather through their entire body in connection with others immediately and distally surrounding them; they operate within and through a social context that can either enhance or limit their potential for happiness. Teachers who address “holistic development” attend to students as individuals and social beings. My study shows *how* teachers were able to help students develop holistically, and how, as a result of their time in the classes studied, students experienced their lives and relationships in more holistic ways and saw themselves as *relational, creative and capable*, and *unique* human beings. As we prepare students to be leaders, as well as caring, empowered, and participatory members of society, understanding how to help

them develop in these ways is essential and my study provides important insights on how to facilitate this development.

**Theoretical and methodological choices that help us hear student voices.**

The third significant aspect of the study relates to the theoretical and methodological foundations that helped me focus on relationships and student voices. I purposefully aimed to capture the role of caring relationships by grounding my observations in Nel Noddings' care theory. Significant to this study and future research on the impact of caring environments, I integrated best practices from the research on care theory for culturally diverse learners and feminist difference theory with Noddings' ideas. This more complete picture of care theory enabled me to capture how important relationships and community are for students in supporting their creative and holistic growth. I eagerly look forward to how researchers working with diverse learners can apply this extended model in other settings and content areas, especially to understand how to engage students in social action.

Attention to bringing out student voice and diversity informed my methodological choices as well. Firstly, I chose to conduct my study in divergent school settings in two countries. One aim of this choice was to understand how different settings and student populations affect the role of care. A second aim, more importantly, was to bring in student voices from a broader range of backgrounds and experiences. Secondly, I chose to have the students make photo essays, within and outside of class, to expand my gaze and understanding of their world as it relates to visual arts. By having students create photo essays to depict what their visual arts experiences meant to them, I learned about

their lives outside of school, individual realities most often ignored and undervalued. Expanding the lens through which we understand students' experiences holds great promise and power and dramatically enriched what I learned and now share.

### **The importance of retaining caring and creative teachers.**

Lastly, my study powerfully reinforces the stark reality that if we don't take action to support teachers who go above and beyond the call of duty for their students, we are going to lose them. Not only the students needed liberating, positively structured, and compassionate environments; their teachers need similar support. My classroom observations, interviews, and photo essays reveal how important these teachers are in students' lives. At a time when achievement gaps, drop-out rates, and an overall lack of connection to their education plague large numbers of our students, we cannot afford to lose those teachers who make a difference.

### **Aims and Research Questions**

This study describes, interprets, and appraises student perceptions and insights as well as the classroom ecology of six secondary level visual arts classes whose teachers identify caring and creativity as critical aspects of their teaching. The aim is to highlight how the intentions and operations of these teachers impact student learning, creative risk taking, and interpersonal relations within and beyond the classroom. The study uncovers novel ways of thinking about arts education as a means to enhance positive individual and social development and vividly illustrates the conceptual frameworks and pedagogical methods used to do so.

To achieve these goals I answered four questions. First, *what are the intentions of arts teachers who state that they believe creative and caring environments are essential for arts instruction and students' holistic development?* Moroye (2007) offers a succinct and tangible definition of “intentions” as a “teacher’s stated or unstated goals or objectives for individuals and groups of students in his/her classes and for his/her practice in general” (p. 15). “Caring environments” were defined by each teacher and understood within the scope of Nel Noddings’ theories on care as expanded to include care theory for diverse learners and difference feminist theory. Description and assessment of teacher and student “creativity” drew on developmental theories that view creativity as a process versus product oriented phenomena, with individual, social, affective, and intellectual components. The phrase “essential for arts instruction” indicates that the teachers selected for the study subscribe to the paradigm that creative and caring behaviors, language, and settings must be present for the growth and development of their students. As a reminder, “holistic development” refers to students developing as complex beings, physically, emotionally, and interrelationally within and through their surroundings.

Second, *how are these intentions realized (or not realized) in their practice?* I assessed what teachers actually do and if their actions embody the traits of caring and creativity they intend to bring into being. Comparing intentions with teacher actions helped bring forth the qualities facilitating or inhibiting the realization of teachers’ intentions. For the purposes of this study, “practice” focuses on what the teacher does and included curriculum development, classroom design and set-up, forms of communication utilized, words spoken, interactions outside the classroom, and other corporeal qualities.

Third, *how does the enacted curriculum (the ideas, activities and actions created by teacher and students) affect students' willingness to take creative risks?* “Creative risks” refers to students engaging in behaviors that yield either 1) a concrete product that embodies novel (to the student) forms of thought or production, or 2) novel ways of interacting with others and/or participating in the classroom. The key concept is that creativity can be nurtured through curricular, pedagogical, evaluative, and aesthetic choices grounded in caring choices and actions.

Fourth, *how do the intentions and practices of the teacher impact student self-concepts?* I explored the notion that creative and caring intentions and practices enhance the development of positive student self-concepts. By “self-concepts” I refer to the internal and external language students use to refer to beliefs they hold to be true about themselves, including physical, emotional, and psychological descriptors of the self in isolation and in relation to others.

In short, this investigation provides vivid description, interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of the most striking facets of creative and caring visual arts classrooms. By determining the intentions of the teachers and understanding the daily happenings in these classrooms, I uncovered what it means for students to be in these settings and the subsequent impact on their willingness to take creative risks and self-concept development, and discuss the implications of such settings for visual arts and other educational environments.

## **Overview of Methodology**

In order to capture the rich, multi-dimensional aspects of the practices of teachers who view caring and creativity as essential for their instruction and student skill and positive self-concept development, I chose educational connoisseurship and criticism for my research method. Through a referral process and personal communication, I selected six teachers who expressed a personal interest in participating in the study and showed high levels of caring and creative beliefs and behaviors on a screening questionnaire ([Appendix D](#)). Before observing their practice for between five and 10 days, I interviewed each participant ([Appendix E](#)). Teachers were given their interview transcripts, as well as an opportunity to review preliminary findings and engage in ongoing dialogue after the study. I also selected 25 students, with the help of each teacher, to take photographs within and/or outside of class to show how their experiences with their visual arts teacher impacted their lives (purposely open-ended to allow for a wide range of responses). The students also participated in a semi-structured interview after taking their photos ([Appendix F](#)). Chapter Three further details my methodology.

## **Chapter Two: Relevant Literature Review**

### **Overview**

The literature on arts education in general and caring and creativity specifically spans the past century and a vast array of information. However, in choosing how to craft this chapter, I narrowed the scope of the works covered and purposely focus on those that give the reader an understanding of the major theories and ideas guiding my study. I begin with a discussion of creativity, followed by care theory. I also examine the literature on holistic and self-concept development as it relates to my study.

### **Creativity**

Discussions on creativity populate the literature, presenting and incorporating definitions and descriptions of creativity from ancient times (Rothenberg, Rothenberg, & Hausman, 1976) through the development of modern concepts (Cropley, 2006). For the purposes of this study, however, I have identified and will use salient components for which the literature supports a link between modern notions of creativity and holistic development and positive self-concept (Sawyer, John-Steiner, Moran, Sternberg, Feldman, Nakamura, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Three aspects are at the core of modern creativity theories and will guide my identification and investigation of creativity throughout the study: 1) novelty (a product or action deviates from what is known and familiar); 2) effectiveness (the product or action meets a particular goal whether social, aesthetic, or material); and 3) ethicality (the term “creativity” is not applied to

destructive, criminal, or harmful behavior) (Cropley, 2006). Beyond these aspects, creativity incorporates effect, cause, and interaction (Cropley, 2006). *Effect* includes the creation of tangible products, such as works of art, chairs, airplanes, and intangible products such as the development of ideas and ways of relating to others. *Cause* is defined as people, in particular creative people. Prodigious abilities play a part (Feldman, 1986), as do domain-specific skills (Gardner, 1993; John-Steiner, 1997). *Interaction* with the environment often determines, however, if a person's creativity will flourish or languish. Certain environments are "congenial" to creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) and empower individuals via "assistors" versus hinder them through "resistors" (Treffinger, 1995). Most importantly, congenial environments facilitate creative attitudes, which is critical because:

creativity is as much a decision about and an attitude toward life as it is a matter of ability. Creativity is often obvious in young children, but it may be harder to find in older children and adults because their creative potential has been suppressed by a society that encourages intellectual conformity. (Sternberg, 2003, p. 98)

### **Creativity can be nurtured.**

A review of the literature on creativity and arts education reveals ongoing debates and struggles about how to best understand artistic creative processes and the role of research to this end. Early research in the 1950's was conducted primarily by psychologists trying to understand the workings of the creative mind because arts educators at the time often held "strong attitudes against using art for scientific inquiry; especially by those artist-teachers who insist on the metaphysical and spiritual basis for creative inspiration" (Saunders, 1968, p. 120). The debate involved those researchers who



believed that the creative process could be developed and those who argued “that you cannot teach a person to be an artist” (Saunders, 1968, p.120).

Recent research emphasizes the role of arts education in developing student creativity and the importance of attending to this paradigm in developing arts education programs. For example, a large scale study conducted in Great Britain by the National Advisory Committee on Culture and Education (NACCE) resulted in the report “All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture, and Education” (1999). The report clearly describes future economic and employment challenges, as well as socio-cultural and diversity concerns students will face; by teaching for creativity teachers enhance students’ self-esteem, prepare them to address a wide variety of academic and other challenges, and maximally versus narrowly develop their potential. According to the report, living in an increasingly diverse and interdependent world requires empathy and creative thinking. In sum, the “concerns with creative and culture education point in two directions: First, to making the most of young people’s own resources: what they have within them. Second to helping them understand the world that surrounds them and of which they are a part” (NACCE, 1999, p. 70). A follow-up report provided recommendations and guidelines for how to put the NACCE report into action. The commitment to and value of creativity in education and the caring networks needed to fulfill this commitment were reinforced (Roberts, 2006).

Project Zero out of Harvard University echoes the findings of the NACCE report. Project Zero’s researchers are currently engaged in a study titled the “The Qualities of Quality: Excellence in Arts Education and How to Achieve It” which aims “to synthesize

what is currently understood about the critical elements of high quality arts teaching and learning and to identify effective strategies for creating those experiences for school-age youth in diverse settings” (Seidel, Winner, Hetland, & Tishman, 2008). The role of creativity in arts education is not explicitly explored in the “Qualities” study, but the findings support enriched cognitive functioning in study participants (Ritchhart, Palmer, Church, & Tishman, 2006) and instructional strategies and student traits that embody aspects of creativity (Gardner, 1989).

The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) has been a driving force behind arts education research in the United States. Several studies over the past ten years have supported the importance of arts education in visual, auditory, and cognitive development (Goldhawk, 1998), in engaging students in their education (Fiske, 2000), and in strengthening academic and social development (Deasy, 2002). Several other studies support the role of the arts in positive youth development. *Third Space: When Learning Matters* (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005) vividly portrays the benefits of arts-based schools for children and teens living in economically disadvantaged areas and discusses the impact of these environments on student creativity and self-esteem. The authors used qualitative methods to capture the non-linear, social impact of the environments they studied, a methodology that attends to research concerns of arts educators during the 1950’s and 1960’s (Saunders, 1968). Other researchers have drawn upon qualitative methods as well, perhaps because it allows them to capture complex aspects which better describe how learning occurs, as well as the impact of arts learning environments on teachers (Poon, 2004) and students (Koff, 1995; Marshall, 1998; Stout, 1999).

Increasingly people in the business world and education focus more specifically on actions people can take to nurture others' or enhance their own creativity. Robinson (2001) argues that "creativity is not a special quality confined to special people and it can be taught" (p. 114).<sup>1</sup> He makes this statement boldly in part to fight against powerful misconceptions that only the special few are creative. I have taught art to people aged four to 64 over the past six years and have run up against this notion repeatedly. Inevitably my younger students never hesitate to feel free to imagine an idea and make it real.<sup>2</sup> My adult students, on the other hand, apologize for not being creative and seriously doubt that they will leave with a project that is at all special or unique. Most of the adults share stories of art teachers who put them down, shut off their thinking, or never worked patiently enough with them to help them develop their skills. The consequences for them individually are painful enough; add their stories to the collective of adults who say they are not creative and you have a crisis. To prevent this crisis, Robinson (2002) recommends that organizations (schools being an organization) adopt three priorities for building creativity:

- 1) *Identifying*: providing systematically for the identification and development of the creative strengths and abilities of all of the individuals in the organisation;

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<sup>1</sup> Nel Noddings (personal communication, May 10, 2010) warns against stating that creativity can be *taught* because of reductionist tendencies in education to generate and apply canned formulas to "teach" students complex processes, such as creativity. Noddings worries that attempts to help develop student creativity could fall victim to such tendencies and urges the use of terms such as "nurturing" or "developing" creativity to keep educators on the right path.

<sup>2</sup> Ken Robinson tells a story in his 2006 TED conference presentation about a little girl drawing in class. It's the first activity in which she's engaged wholeheartedly and the teacher sees her passion. When the teacher asks her what she is drawing, the little girl replies that she's drawing a picture of God. The teacher gently admonishes her and says that no one knows what God looks like. The little girl replies, "They will in a minute."

- 2) *Facilitating*: providing the conditions within the organisation as a whole through which creative processes are actively supported and encouraged;
- 3) *Employing*: harnessing creative outcomes to the core objectives of the organisation. (Robinson, 2001, p. 183)

These steps seem relatively straight forward, yet are rarely realized within school structures. Within individual classrooms, in particular visual arts classrooms, the priorities can serve as a framework with which to assess teacher actions. The aim is to create a culture that rewards and inspires creative thinking as a collective, in turn supporting creative expression in the individual (Sternberg, 2003).

Pink (2006) believes that a weakened aptitude for creativity stems from the “narrowly reductive and deeply analytical” mode of thinking which dominated during the past century (p. 2). He argues that people must develop their aptitudes for “high touch” and “high concept” thinking in order to meet changing demands:

High concept involves the capacity to detect patterns and opportunities, to create artistic and emotional beauty, to craft a satisfying narrative, and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into something new. High touch involves the ability to empathize with others, to understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one’s self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning. (p. 2-3)

He draws upon the characterization of “left-brain” (last century) versus “right-brain” (the future) thinking to emphasize his point, using it as a metaphor to distinguish between what worked in the past but will not serve people as well in the future. The “‘right-brain’ qualities of inventiveness, empathy, joyfulness, and meaning – increasingly will determine who flourishes and flounders” (Pink, 2006, p. 3). He proposes that people can learn to think creatively and activate a “whole new mind.”

Reynolds (2008) uses Pink's ideas and works from a business model as well but goes one step further by suggesting that using creative methods in business draws upon innate human experiences of story, play, and meaning making, all converging together to help people "create an opportunity to make a difference in the world" (p. 19). For Reynolds, "Being creative does not mean wearing black turtlenecks and hanging out in jazz cafes sipping cappuccinos – it means using your whole mind to find solutions" (p. 35). He references a 1938 book, *If You Want to Write* by Brenda Ueland in which she talks about "'the big lie' that we tell ourselves: 'I am not creative'" (p. 36) and sets out to convince his audience that they need to rethink what it means to be creative. At this point he provides descriptors of the creative process in line with Robinson, Pink, and Sternberg, advocating that "failing is fine, necessary in fact," and that it's important to "take chances and stretch yourself. You're only here on this planet once, and for a very short time at that. Why not just see how gifted you are? You may surprise someone. Most importantly, you may surprise yourself" (p. 36).

Reynolds' shares other core ideas from Ueland that mirror holistic development values. She writes about encouraging people to be free like children, to play, to get silly, and to be bold. Even within the business world, the importance of play for creativity and happiness has found support.

Play is emerging from the shadows of frivolousness and assuming a place in the spotlight...Play is becoming an important part of work, business, and personal well-being, its importance manifesting itself in three ways: games, humor, and joyfulness...Humor is showing itself to be an accurate marker for managerial effectiveness, emotional intelligence, and the thinking style characteristic of the brain's right hemisphere. And, joyfulness, as exemplified by unconditional laughter, is demonstrating its power to make us more productive and fulfilled. (Pink, 2006, p. 188)

Equally important to play is having time to sit idle and let ideas evolve, as is putting your passion into what you do: “Put your love, passion, imagination, and spirit behind it. Without enthusiasm there is no creativity. It may be a quiet enthusiasm, or it may be loud. It doesn’t matter as long as it is real” (Reynolds, 2008, p. 37). This belief finds support in Csikszentmihalyi’s 1996 book on creativity in which he talks about creative people working from their interests, and Freedman (2010) who advocates allowing students to work from their interests. However, often times people fear sharing their passions and taking risks. Reynolds (2008) advises, “Don’t hang out with people who dismiss the idea of enthusiasm, or worse still, those who try to kill yours” (p. 37). Creative possibilities that ensue from enthusiasm manifest themselves not only in a necessarily creative setting (such as visual arts or graphic design). For example, millionaire social entrepreneurs who have had the greatest success in achieving their goals have worked from their beliefs and passions in creative ways, including innovation, determination to take risks, and shrugging off external constraints (Elkington & Hartigan, 2008).

In addition to creativity stemming from interests and passions, Freedman (2010) argues that creativity is reflexive, often starting with artists experiencing dissonance within their environment, a tension between what is and how they envision it should be. Along with other theorists mentioned earlier, Freedman also views creativity as having a functional component with creative production being useful for many reasons, whether it’s helping an audience see something differently or demonstrating learning. Additionally, creativity is a social activity typified by artists working in a professional

community that supports their endeavors, and in which the members of the group push each other in their thinking and art production. Lastly, creativity involves not only production but reproduction whereby artists build “on old ideas, images, and objects in the production of the new” (Freedman, 2010, p. 13).

Gude (2010) argues that teachers have to realize that creativity must be *nurtured*. Too often teachers assume creativity will just happen and “overlook actual processes associated with creative content” (p. 33). According to Gude, the first step in the process is to establish a psychologically safe environment in which “the individual is not judged for how well he/she meets a pre-determined model of process or product” (Gude, 2010, p. 34). Play serves as an essential catalyst and helps students feel safe to tap into and explore creative possibilities. The more teachers consciously engage students in play, the more likely they will be to take creative risks. Equally important, teachers have to help students “make nuanced observations of inner experiences as they engage in creative work” (p. 36), which helps them tap into “aha” moments where everything clicks and an idea comes together. Teachers also have to serve as a calming, outside guide as students process the complex emotions that often accompany “being deeply engaged with a creative pursuit that is becoming increasingly personal and encompassing” (p. 36). Through play, art production, and guidance, teachers support student efforts to achieve the primary objective of a creativity curriculum which is “developing the capacity of students to instinctively respond to situation with playful creative behaviors” (p. 36).

Eisner (2002) echoes Gude’s notion that students must turn inward at some point to maximize their creative potential. He describes how outside influences necessarily

affect the creative process by inducing “inhibitions and frustrates the whole aim” and that to offset this problem, teachers must act as “attendant, guide, inspirer, psychic midwife” (Eisner, 2002, p. 33) to allow the creative process to flow. In essence, teachers should help students experience “flow” (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003). Critical variables for the experience of flow in the creative process are concentration, interest, and enjoyment: *concentration* occurs when someone experiences a state of deep concentration or absolute absorption with a task (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990); *interest* serves as the foundation from which one decides to engage in an activity (Shernoff et al., 2003); and *enjoyment* involves feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction that generally follow a successful endeavor (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

### **How do you study creativity?**

The aims of this study, as discussed earlier, are mostly concerned with teacher views on creativity and how they work to enhance creative action and thought in their students. I will work from the premise that people choose to be creative and need environments that help them make that choice. To ground my observations I will look for twenty-one actions educators can take and attitudes they can adopt to enrich their own creativity and that of their students<sup>3</sup> (Sternberg, 2003). These actions are supported not only in the academic literature but reflect applications of creativity theory in business (Florida, 2002; Hayes, 2004; Pink, 2006; Robinson, 2001; von Oech, 1998). However,

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<sup>3</sup> The 21 actions are: redefine the problem, question and analyze assumptions, do not assume that creative ideas sell themselves, sell them; encourage idea generation; recognize that knowledge is a double-edged sword and act accordingly, encourage children to identify and surmount obstacles, encourage sensible risk-taking, encourage tolerance of ambiguity, help children build self-efficacy, help children find what they love to do, teach children the importance of delaying gratification, model creativity, cross-fertilize ideas, allow time for creative thinking, instruct and assess for creativity, reward creativity, allow mistakes, teach children to take responsibility for both successes and failures, encourage creative collaboration, teach children to imagine things from others’ points of view; maximize person-environment fit.



unlike the quantitative studies used to test Sternberg's model and the impact of its use on student academic performance, I will use qualitative methods to attend to these themes as they relate to understanding and assessing creative effects, causes, and interactions.

### **Caring**

The desirable outcomes described in studies or thinking on creativity in large measure result from the caring behaviors on the part of teachers, administrators, community leaders, and students. Other than attention to cultural competencies outlined in the NACCE study and the few dissertations on the subject, very little, if any mention is made specifically about the role of care. Intentionally examining the impact of caring behaviors on student creativity will help us understand what caring looks like and how to engage in caring behaviors to help teach and enable creativity, holistic development, and positive self-concept.

#### **Nel Noddings' themes of care.**

In her book, *The Challenge to Care in Schools* (1992), Nel Noddings describes various centers of care, several which inform this study, including care for/in: self; the inner circle; animals, plants, and the Earth; the human-made world; and ideas. In addition to looking at these centers of care, Noddings emphasizes the importance of positive, ongoing relationships between students and teachers for their well being and that of society as a whole because "human relationships are perhaps the most important single ingredient in happiness" (Noddings, 2003, p. 179).

After reviewing the arts education and creativity literature, I found three dominant centers of care described, although not directly referenced in the terminology set out by

Noddings (1992). These centers are as follows: 1) Care for self, which includes attending to the “vital concerns... [of an individual’s] physical, spiritual, occupational, and recreations life” (Noddings, 1992, p. 74). This center of care includes multiple and complex aspects of being, areas essential to explore when ascertaining how an educational setting impacts a student’s ability to care for self; 2) Care for the inner circle which highlights that “*Caring* in both its natural and ethical senses, describes a certain kind of relation...These relationships may be equal or unequal” (p. 91); and 3) Care for the human-made world which addresses “...how we treat things has an impact on both human and nonhuman life” (p. 139), affecting how we use resources and the “subsequent moral implications” (p. 139) of that use. This type of care includes human aesthetic sensibilities and the ability to appreciate and value the creative processes and products of humankind.

The data from my study indicated that additional centers of care are important aspects of caring and creative classrooms as follows: care for the Earth, care for the human made world, and care for ideas. In regards to care for the Earth, Noddings (1992) believes that students should participate in activities that engage them with the natural world in order to develop an intimate connection to nature and subsequent understanding of the Earth’s fragility. The ultimate goal is to have students act in personally responsible ways and to hopefully spur them to political action. Care for the human made world involves learning the proper use of objects, as well as an historical context for their use. The concepts of appreciation, avoiding wastefulness, maintenance and care for materials, and aesthetic values also surfaced as integral to this center of care. In care for ideas,

students should have the opportunity to study a topic simply because they show a passion and genuine interest. They should be able to explore ideas at a deep level, in ways that reflect their passion and the passion of others in a particular field. Ultimately, reaching for the highest standard in an area of passion shapes students' minds.

### **Care for culturally diverse learners and within feminist literature.**

Research on cultural and gender issues suggests that we need to use additional lenses in our work to ensure that dominant cultural tendencies are noticed and addressed. In thinking about care for culturally diverse learners, I draw upon the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy, multicultural education, and humanizing pedagogy. For diverse learners, “caring is one of the major pillars” (Gay, 2000, p. 45) and is “characterized by patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment for the participants” (p. 47). Caring teachers are seen as “warm demanders” (Kleinfeld as cited in Gay, 2000, p. 50) in that they push students to succeed when engaging in meaningful and challenging learning. For Nieto (1999), caring includes believing that all students have talents and strengths and “providing a feeling of belonging for all members and creating a sense of mutual responsibility within the group” (p. 99). Tatum (1997) focuses attention on the notion that “our ongoing examination of who we are in our full humanity, embracing all of our identities, creates the possibility of building alliances that may ultimately free us all” (Tatum, 1997, p. 28). Part of the passion behind these viewpoints reflects Paulo Freire’s idea that “...teachers no longer simply deposit knowledge into students’ minds; rather, teachers become actively engaged in learning through their

interactions with students” (Nieto, 1999, p. 142) and caring environments facilitate this process.

Students view caring places as “‘homes away from home,’ places where they [are] nourished, supported, protected, encouraged, and held accountable” (Gay, 2000, 47). Teachers have “faith and conviction in the students’ abilities, being demanding, yet supportive and encouraging” (Gay, 2000, p. 47). One study found that ethnically diverse students believed that caring teachers “listened to and respected them, encouraged them to express their opinions, and was friend toward them both in and out of class” (Gay, 2000, p. 49). Caring teachers work with their students in a partnership “anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence” (Gay, 2000, p. 52).

This notion of the importance of partnership and respect has found ongoing support in a study by Salazar (2008). For the Chicano/Mexicano students participating in her study, “the cultivation of consejos (verbal teachings), confianza (mutual trust) and buen ejemplos (exemplary models) is important for academic success, ‘pero lo más importante es respeto’ (but what is most important is respect).” Such humanizing interactions result in students’ academic resiliency (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004). Teachers know how to draw upon student cultural backgrounds, languages, and strengths and weave them into how they present the official curriculum, a concept Dyson labeled the permeable curriculum, which is an approach that “serves as a bridge, bringing the worlds of teachers and students together in instructionally powerful ways” (Salazar, 2008, p. 343). Caring teachers draw upon students’ cultural and linguistic differences in ways that

aim for greater educational equality and individual student success. These teachers mentor and guide their students to help them overcome “tremendous barriers related to poverty, racism, and other social ills” (Nieto, 2002, p. 9).

In a report on teaching and learning in a multicultural society, researchers recommend that schools “create and make salient superordinate or cross-cutting groups in order to improve group relations” (Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, Schoefield, & Stephan, 2001, p. 200). The aim is for students to be able to work together and accept each other, similar to what Noddings advocates in care for the inner circle. Nieto (1999) further supports this goal, stating that such relations will provide “a feeling of belonging for all members and [create] a sense of mutual responsibility within the group” (p. 98). This sense of mutual responsibility means that the students will feel empowered to be there for each other and know that their actions make a difference positively, or negatively. It also allows them to be open to allowing others to care for them, which shapes student holistic development.

Feminist literature expands our perspective even further. Carol Gilligan identified that women define themselves within relationships and on their ability to care (Gilligan, 1982). Most educational situations spotlight “‘the ethos of justice’ (negotiating rights and responsibilities) [versus] ‘the ethos of care’ (working relationally to make and keep human connections and avoid damage)” (Gilligan as quoted in Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 209). Looking for and paying attention to this tendency better informs and broadens the gaze with which we understand care. Ellsworth (1989) writes from a feminist perspective and addresses issues of critical pedagogy that affect both students of

different cultures and genders. She does not use the word “caring” directly, but rather refers to giving students voice. She writes that, “The task of the critical educator becomes...encouraging students of different race, class, and gender positions to speak in self-affirming ways about their experiences and how they have been mediated by their own social positions and those of others” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 309).

More recent feminist theorists align with Ellsworth’s ideas and disparage earlier notions of care as perpetuating stereotypes and oppressive institutions but acknowledge that a tenuous consensus exists that:

No matter how friendly or concerned a teacher might be, if she fails to acknowledge and respond to her students’ needs – or the needs of the families and communities involved – then in the view of most caring theorists, her response could not be considered caring. (Thompson, 2003, p. 27)

Additionally, caring educators have to attend to critical perspectives and “must examine the modeling, practice, dialogue, and confirmation they provide and decide whether they contribute to, negate, or fail to stimulate students caring attitudes about themselves and others” (Armon, 1997, p. 358).

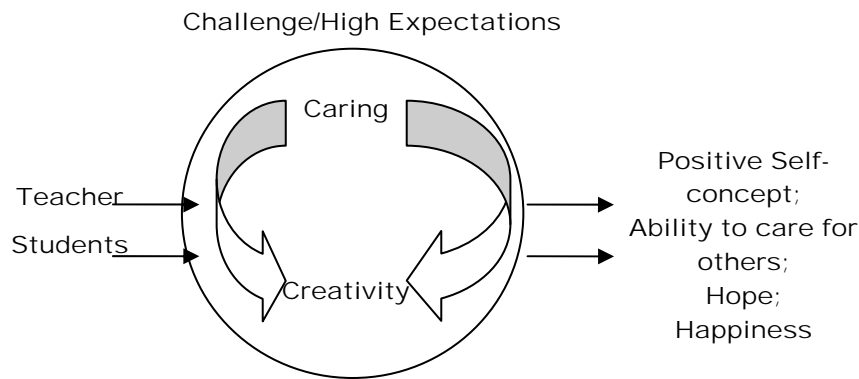
### **How do you study caring?**

Elaborating on elements of care suggested by the theories discussed above, a review of the literature suggests that kinesthetic learning (Manwiller, 2007), awareness and inclusion of students’ cultural heritage (Garner, 2007), competent and motivating teachers (Votteler, 2007), and an emphasis on caring about others (Moroye, 2007) demand our attention when designing research on caring and its impact on students and teachers. The implication is that caring is a multi-faceted, complex experience demanding sensitivity to the myriad ways people interact with each other and the world around them.

To get at the nature, practice, and impact of care in educational settings, researchers have used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods have tended to be reductionist, necessarily limiting their scope to linear analyses dictated by statistical and traditional empirical research methods. As a result, the findings do little to deepen our understanding of and appreciation for the nature and impact of caring environments on students and teachers (e.g., Ruggerio, 2007). Qualitative methods, in contrast, yield rich, descriptive information that helps elucidate the complex web of beliefs, relationships, behaviors, and actions that make up caring and inform my exploration of caring in visual arts education settings (e.g., Moroye, 2007; Vascak, 1999). To help me attend to the complex reality of caring environments, I have drawn upon the various theories and concepts of care and developed a framework to help guide my observations and analysis ([Appendix C](#)).

### **Interaction Effect between Creativity and Caring**

A theme I developed as a result of my review of the literature is that there is a relationship between creativity and caring. To be certain, creativity and caring can exist without each other, but when both find a place within a teacher, a student, a learning environment, they appear to enhance the effects of each other. The questions guiding this study aim to better understand this interaction effect as depicted in the following model:



*Figure 1. Interactive model of caring and creativity*

The proposition is that caring requires creative, divergent thinking and problem solving to determine how best to meet student needs; in essence it requires a sense of imagination, using Greene's (1995) words, for "...imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called 'other' over the years" (Greene, 1995 p. 3). Such thinking requires a great deal of effort (Hayes, 2004), and the more teachers care about their students the more likely they are to put forth the effort. In turn, as students feel cared for, they respond in kind towards each other and the teacher, which enhances positive student creative risk-taking and positive self-concept (Kramer, 2008). This dynamic is nestled under high expectations with scaffolding to meet those expectations. Learning must confront students with a meaningful challenge that helps them find value in their abilities (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999; Shernoff et al., 2003; Tatum 1997) but does not discourage their efforts (Noddings, 2003). Research on student engagement and creativity in general further supports the relationship between mastering challenging material and learning.



Shernoff et al. (2003) write that:

It is important to emphasize that providing curricular tasks that are too easy does not appear to be an effective strategy for facilitating student engagement any more than giving students tasks that are too difficult. Optimal engagement appears to be promoted by a moderate difference between the challenge of a task and an individual's skills. (p. 172)

Students are more attentive to instruction and better able to actively participate, even when anxious, when they face higher challenges at which they believe they can be successful (Shernoff et al., 2003). Facing and meeting these challenges ultimately allows students to have “perceptions of high competence and autonomy [which] are associated with significant increases in mood, enjoyment, esteem, and intrinsic motivation,” an association referred to as “positive emotional response” (p. 172). When teachers care for students and realize they need to help them find success through challenging endeavors, they must themselves think creatively. The ultimate outcome is student holistic and positive self-concept development.

### **Holistic Development and Positive Self-Concept**

Through my review of the literature I found that numerous arts education scholars see a direct link between creativity and holistic and positive self-concept development. A representative example is an article by Hausman (2010) in which he writes about a 1953 Conference on Creativity, hosted by Ohio State University and sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. He shares that the participants at the conference generated a rich concept of creativity as essential for full human experience and expression, including the belief that:

creative experience provides ‘a way of forming experience which is basic to the organic growth of human personality;’...’functions to form particular aspects of an individual’s ideas, feelings, and attitudes so that they become an integral part

of the whole stream of his living;’ ...[and that] the intensity for feeling and forming which creative experience encourages ‘leads to a more generalized outcome, than that related to the arts as such, since it sensitizes the student to a discipline which can be used to form many other experiences in life.’ (Hausman, 2010, p. 6)

This concept of creativity as developmentally essential finds further support in Saunders’ work. Saunders (1968) highlights the value of the arts in developing students more holistically, beyond the cognitive/intellectual realm. He argues that using the arts is essential because children “need to have a sensitive and balanced development” (p. 124) in order to survive “the encroaching mechanization, automation, and computerization of the twenty-first century” (p. 124).<sup>4</sup> In line with Saunders, Vygotsky views “creativity as a growing, positive capability of all healthily functioning individuals” (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003, p. 72), while Feldman believes that “creativity is a ‘transformational imperative’ in everyone” (Feldman as cited in Moran & John-Steiner, p. 72). This personal development may in part stem from how “work in the arts enables us to stop looking over our shoulder and to direct our attention inward to what we believe or feel” (Eisner, 2002, p. 10). Moran and John-Steiner (2003) carry this idea even further by demonstrating how creativity shapes identity:

Mastery also has a more subjective component, that of personal transformation. For example, the more positively people experience creative activities, the more creativity becomes a part of their personalities. Over time, they gain more recognized patterns and more formal systems of concepts to draw from and to transform into creative, cultural products within their chosen domains. Creativity, then, not only transforms objective materials into creative products; it also transforms the creator. (p. 78)

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<sup>4</sup> His words take on greater meaning as technology has grown even more dominant and pervasive in children’s lives than Saunders might have imagined possible.

This idea of transformation, of creative work shaping a person holistically ties into ideas of self-concept as well. As the work transforms the creator, how that person sees him or herself changes as well. Various labels are used in the psychological literature to denote positive self-concept, including “self-esteem,” “self-image,” “self-awareness,” “self-schemas,” and “self-worth” (Blanch, 2007; Harter, 1999). For the purposes of this paper I will be using the term “positive self-concept” to describe the:

global perception of the self as a person. People with a [positive self-concept] possess a positive overall view of the self. They appreciate who they are, consider themselves to have many good qualities, and would not want to change places with others. (Trautwein & Lüdtke, 2006)

Which factors in students’ environments, and the interaction effects thereof, influence the development of positive self-concept are passionately debated within the psychological and sociological literature (Blanch, 2007; Trautwein & Lüdtke, 2006). Since my aim for this paper is to focus on students’ perceptions and not causal or correlational analysis, working from the above definition and framework provides sufficient information to my guide discussion.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Summary**

As stated earlier the goal of this study is to describe, interpret, and appraise student perceptions and insights as well as the classroom ecology of six secondary level visual arts classes whose teachers identify caring and creativity as critical aspects of their teaching. Three schools in Colorado, one urban, one rural, and one suburban, as well as three schools in Australia, one rural and two suburban were included in the study. I used educational connoisseurship and criticism expanded through the use of visual images to help me capture the qualities of conditions students encountered in the classes studied. The following framework guided my investigation of the major factors of classroom life and the reciprocal action and reaction between these factors.

### **Six Dimensions of Educational Experiences Guiding the Study**

Dewey (1934) writes that “life goes on in an environment; not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it...and the career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way” (p. 12). Eisner’s five dimensions (intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative), as well as the aesthetic dimension (Uhrmacher, 1991) of educational experiences acknowledge what Dewey is saying and enable a thorough exploration of people’s lived experiences within educational environments specifically.

These dimensions provide the framework for this study and might be understood as follows.

The *intentional dimension* refers to explicit and non-explicit but actuated aims or goals (Eisner, 1998). Discussion of aims “centers on the deepest questions in education” (Noddings, 2003, p. 75) as contrasted with goals or objectives which explain “why we are doing something” (p. 75). Aims-talk may include questions about human nature, the welfare of the state, or the role of the individual versus the educational system, among other topics (Noddings, 2003). In this study, I look to understand the aims and goals of the teachers directly and their influence on classroom practice and student perceptions, while at the same time noting the influence of broader societal, school, parental, and student aims as needed.

The *structural dimension* deals with “how the organizational envelopes we have designed affect how education occurs” (Eisner, 1998, p. 75). It includes the use of time and physical space, as well as the space for relationships. Some questions that arise from this dimension include: How does the amount of time set aside for each class period impact a teacher’s ability to realize his/her intentions? Do teachers have to work around the structures of time and space imposed or do the structures facilitate teacher’s efforts and students’ experiences? How do students navigate the space within and beyond the class? How does the use of technology expand or reduce time and space for communication between teachers, students, parents, and administrators? Studies on the impact of “space” in arts education suggests that the structural dimension is an important factor (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005 Stueck, 1992).; In particular, the idea of “third space,” a

term used to “capture the atmosphere in the classroom when a [teacher] and her students create works of art, one in which students are deeply absorbed and able to take the risks demanded in a creative process” (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005, p. 10) emerged as important in the study.

The *curricular dimension* consists of what is being taught, why, how, and how well (Eisner, 1998). To help describe this critical dimension, I refer back to an assignment for my theories of curriculum class in which my son helped me write a cartoon about “Mr. Poppy Needleman” and “Creative-caring woman.” In the cartoon, Mr. Poppy Needleman required the children to learn about balloon animals and how to make them using only worksheets and to take written tests on what they learned. They could not touch balloons, fill them with air, manipulate them, or hear how they sounded when twisted. Although the curriculum appeared to be about balloon animals, it was actually about compliance and control (hidden curriculum). The children turned into “boredom zombies” as a result. Creative-caring woman charged in with a different curriculum model, overtook Mr. Poppy Needleman, and the children learned about balloon animals by doing and were “happy.” This story illustrates how dramatically curriculum can impact students, learning, the school environment, the community at large, and so on. What is missing (null curriculum) matters as much as what is present, just as the absence of touching and manipulating in the balloon-making class communicated volumes about Mr. Poppy Needleman’s expectations for the curriculum. “Negative judgments and perceptions” (Uhrmacher, 1997, p. 320) might have influenced Mr. Poppy Needleman’s choices of how to determine curriculum (shadow curriculum), or perhaps undisclosed

issues of social control motivated him (hidden curriculum) (Uhrmacher, 1997).

Understanding these various aspects of curriculum helped me attend to things I might otherwise have missed when conducting my study.

The *pedagogical dimension* explores how a curriculum is operationalized (Eisner, 1998). How a curriculum is delivered is mediated by the teacher who brings in his/her own style, personality, passions, strengths, and weaknesses. As with the curricular dimension, the pedagogical dimension communicates as much by what teachers do as what they don't do. Drawing on the story of balloon-making, two teachers might follow Creative-caring woman's curriculum. One of the teachers might hate the feel, smell, and sound of balloons; as a result, the teacher makes faces when the children work with the balloons and only brings them out when the principal comes to observe her. The second teacher also dislikes balloons; her response, however, is to bring in guest experts who demonstrate and provide feedback for the children as they work with the balloons. Every aspect of instruction falls into this dimension, including how the teacher asks questions (and of whom), how he/she responds to "teachable moments," and how action and work occur in the classroom (who's working harder – the teacher or the students?). The artistry and flow of teaching are also integral facets of this dimension (Eisner, 1998).

The fifth dimension delineated is the *evaluative dimension* (Eisner, 1998). "Evaluation concerns the making of value judgments about some object, situation, or process" (p. 80) and pervades the classroom as teachers constantly evaluate student comments, work, interactions, and students do the same in relation to their teacher and each other. Evaluation of student work, the quality of interpersonal relations,

responsibility in varied areas, creative exploration, and more is generally ongoing and important for shaping the overall classroom environment and student experiences therein.

An additional dimension is the *aesthetic dimension* which “refers to the kinds and quality of materials used as well as the physical arrangement of materials” (Uhrmacher, 1991, p. 18). This dimension relates to the concept of “third space,” in a way more refined and detailed than the overarching structural dimension. The materials with which the students work (e.g., varied or limited) and where they are located (e.g., easily accessed or locked away), among other aesthetic factors, influence the sensory experiences of the students and impact their relationship to their work and in turn the educational setting.

### **Why Conduct an International Study?**

*Isolation makes for rigidity and formal institutionalizing of life, for static and selfish ideals within the group.*

— Dewey, 1916, p. 86

My main objective for conducting the study internationally was to avoid the pitfalls of isolation. We live in an increasingly interdependent world and I felt an obligation to reach outside my “group.” Eisner (1979) explains the need for cross-cultural research in arts education as follows:

Because all of us operate with certain beliefs about the role of the arts in education and because we conceive of the child's optimum development in certain ways, all of us are guided by theoretical ideas. Within a culture these ideas or theories often become so ubiquitous and widely accepted that we lose the distance needed to criticize them adequately. Cross-cultural research has a potential contribution to make by taking us out of our familiar context and by showing us settings that differ from our own: settings guided by other ideas, practices based upon other assumptions. Such a view has the potential of providing another platform from which to view the theories we hold and with which to reconsider our own practices. (Eisner, 1979, p. 30)



Since Eisner wrote these words, the growth of the internet and the “shrinking” of the world through technology make his message even more vital. Today, in addition to cross-cultural studies being used to understand and reconsider our own practices, it is an imperative that we communicate with and create international scholarly communities (Pinar, 2003; Wasser & Bresler, 1996). Additionally, new concepts of globalization are emerging as researchers work to understand their own experiences in national and international contexts. The impact of this concept of globalization is “to form a new kind of imaginal understanding within human consciousness itself. As a species, we may be imagining ourselves in new ways, especially with respect to issues of identity and citizenship” (Smith as cited in Pinar, 2003, p. 3). Our students are going to live in a more interdependent world, the likes of which we cannot even imagine, and they will continue to grapple with these issues of identity; as educational leaders, we have to model how to cross international bridges in order to help students in their efforts and to enrich their lives (NACCE, 1999). Educational researchers are already crossing these “bridges” in the areas of technology (Yuenyong, Jones, & Yutakom, 2006), music (Pearce, 2007), outdoor (Kime, 2008), teacher (Lo, 2006; You & Jia, 2008), and art (Piscitelli, Chi, & Zhichao, 1999) education, among other topics. By conducting an international study I believe I was able to enhance the quality of my research, the applicability of my findings, and the impact of the experience on myself and the teachers and students with whom I worked.

I selected Australia for the international portion of the study based on my personal experience with the people and culture of the country. I have worked with adults and teens from Australia for seven years and have visited the country several times for at least

three weeks each visit in the past six years. Additionally, I found support and interest from the broader arts education community in Western Australia, which helped me identify teachers who were a good fit for my study.

### **Educational Connoisseurship and Criticism**

*All we can do, I believe, is cultivate multiple ways of seeing and multiple dialogues in a world where nothing stays the same.*

– Maxine Greene, 1995, p. 16

Educational connoisseurship and educational criticism inquiry differs from quantitative/scientific “ways of seeing” and opens up dialogue on the artistry and qualities of educational settings. In choosing this method, I affirmed my desire to move beyond “de-emotionalizing expression” and “suggestive language” in order to have “the opportunity to understand empathically and to communicate the quality of human experience” (Eisner, 1976, p. 138). Educational criticism is an established method of qualitative inquiry used for educational research in a variety of universities throughout the United States and Canada on a range of topics (e.g., Armon, 1997; Kime, 2008; Kydd, 2004; Moroye, 2007; Perlov, 1998; Reynolds, 1997; Sharpswain, 2005; Thompson, 2005) with a history in arts education research (e.g., Alexander, 1983; Barone, 1983; Barone, 1987; Pearce, 2007; Rogers, 1999; Siegesmund, 2000). These studies have supported the use of educational criticism to explore complex, affective, aesthetic, and non-linear nuances and qualities often unattended to in quantitative studies. Since my primary aim is to help educators gain insights that inform and guide their own practices, the descriptive qualities inherent in educational criticism provide rich data and insights upon which educators can draw.

Connoisseurship as envisioned and applied to education is the “art of appreciation” (Eisner, 1998, p. 63) which draws on the researcher’s ability to differentiate between “subtle and complex qualities” (p. 64) of educational experiences. Connoisseurship is “centered on cultivation of deep aesthetic sensibilities...[which allow] the connoisseur...to appreciate deeply because he or she understands deeply” (Hope, 2002). Extensive background knowledge is essential for such appreciation and understanding and facilitates comparisons and descriptions as a result (Eisner, 2002). “Connoisseurship is a private act” (p. 216) that does not require public sharing or disclosure of the connoisseur’s observations. Criticism, on the other hand, makes public the observations of the connoisseur using language to create “a rendering of a situation, event, or object” (Eisner, 2002, p. 217). This rendering serves the purpose of enabling the reader to share in determining the value and importance of the criticism for him/her individually and in the larger social context.

#### **Four dimensions of educational criticism.**

Educational criticism has four dimensions through which the critic transmits his/her observations. In *description* the critic uses narrative to portray what is essential from the subtle qualities of the experience. The goal is to express “what it would feel like if we were there...and its aim is to help the reader know” (Eisner, 1998, p. 89). The critic cannot, and therefore does not, attend to everything in an educational setting, but rather renders those factors that help the reader participate vicariously in the experience and understand and critique the interpretations made based upon these observations. I present my description of the educational settings studied in Chapter Four.

I address the final three dimensions of educational criticism, interpretation, thematics, and evaluation, in Chapter Five. Through *interpretation*, the critic explores the meanings and consequences of the educational setting observed. The goal is to illuminate “the potential consequences of practices observed and [provide] reasons that account for what’s been seen” (Eisner, 1998, p. 95). Theory, experience, and various viewpoints influence how the critic interprets the educational events described; accordingly, there is no one “right” interpretation. Rather, the interpretation facilitates interplay between the critic and the reader in order to develop a concept of reality that “resides neither within an objective external world nor within the subjective mind of the knower, but within dynamic transactions between the two” (Barone, 1992, p. 31).

The *evaluative* dimension appraises the educational significance of the description and interpretation. Education’s “aim is not merely to change students, but to enhance their lives” (Eisner, 1998, p. 98) and evaluation helps discern if the educational experience observed has met this aim. As mentioned earlier, observation itself is evaluative in that the researcher makes choices in what he/she pays attention to. The values that guide observation also inform the evaluative dimension and permeate what I’ve written.

*Thematics* provide the reader with the larger lessons a criticism has to offer (Eisner, 2002). It is the sense that “every particular is also a sample of a larger class” (Eisner, 1998, p. 103). Through this dimension, I’ve provided the reader with major themes that might guide future observations of creativity and caring in visual arts classrooms (and general educational environments). I’ve aimed to provide readers with

novel theories or guides to help them understand and appraise visual arts classrooms, other educational settings, and/or their own pedagogy. By studying the practices of the six teachers in the study, I've developed a powerful understanding of what a creative and caring approach to visual arts instruction means for the students in these settings. The findings demonstrated positive attributes for them, and I believe incorporating these elements will have myriad and rich benefits for students in numerous settings. Although direct application of the traits and qualities revealed through the study in no way can serve as a prescriptive formula for other teachers to follow, I hope the vivid description, interpretation, and analysis of these environments, and student perceptions thereof, will guide teachers desiring to create affirming situations for their own students, whether in visual arts or other educational settings.

**Enhancing educational criticism – Visual images and developing technologies.**

***Rationale.***

The importance of visual data and visual processing in the world grows exponentially almost daily. A new generation of teachers, researchers, and students who understand, interpret, and make meaning through visual images and developing technologies fill our schools and institutions of higher learning. An example of this shift to visual images and developing technologies can be found in modern science: “Much of modern science can no longer be communicated in print; DNA sequences, molecular models, medical imaging scans, brain maps, simulated flights through a terrain, simulations of fluid flow, and so on all need to be expressed and taught visually”

(DeFanti & Brown as cited in Myatt, 2008, p. 188). At the same time, visual experiencing and expression have mattered since humans lived in caves. Creating and looking at visual images produces a visceral response and opens up ways of knowing beyond the capabilities of literary representations (Dewey, 1934; MacDougall, 2006). Visual imagery “encourages uses of metaphor and the empathetic communication of knowledge and experience that cannot be expressed using only words” (Pink, 2007, p. 17) and may address concerns that discursive forms of expression are often limiting in cross-cultural settings (LaPierre, 2000).

Additionally, neuroscience research supports the decision to use photographic images. Studies on neurological processing indicate that visual imagery stimulates different cognitive and affective centers of the brain than those activated by verbal stimuli, and that complex connections between the two explain affective and cognitive reactions (Ochsner, Knierim, Ludlow, Hanelin, Ramachandran, Glover, Mackey 2004; Silver, 2001; Zaidel, 2005). The power of images to stimulate awareness and language related thereto was further supported by Burke and Dollinger (2005) in their study on the use of autophotographic essays in which they found that “pictures did not merely represent words but rather stimulated them” (p. 546). Since my study depended in large part on information derived during the interview process, the use of photographic images elicited metaphorical responses and stimulated more varied areas of the brain involved in creating meaning and awareness, strengthening the overall quality of my findings. By having the students take the photographs, they made connections that they would not have otherwise imagined (Burke & Dollinger, 2005). An additional benefit arose: the

students shared that being asked to take photographs and participate in the study made them feel special and valued. They took seriously the opportunity to share their insights and enlisted friends and family members to help with their photo essays, a level of buy-in and commitment that might not have resulted if I simply pulled students aside for an interview.

### ***Framework.***

Photographs strengthened the *descriptive dimension* in a couple of ways. First, I gave students digital cameras with the direction to record images that reflect what the art class means to them. I taught them how to select color, black and white, and sepia effects to expand the creative opportunities for their visual representations. By doing so I expanded what I could “see” and describe. Second, visual images enhanced my conversations with students and because I understood that they were “vessels in which to invest meanings and through which to produce and represent their knowledge, self-identities, experiences, and emotions” (Pink, 2007, p. 82). The idea was to “prompt personal narratives generated by the content of the image... [and] create a ‘bridge’ between...different experiences of reality” (p. 84). I fully transcribed the interview tapes containing student narratives and referred to these and the photos during analysis.

As stated earlier, through *interpretation* the critic explores the meanings and consequences of the educational setting observed. Using visual representations enriched my interpretation because I drew upon the expertise, the connoisseurship, of the students; through the interviews I heard their interpretations of what was happening in the images as they related to the classroom. I was able to empower students to shift my gaze to see

what they deemed to be important (Foucault, 1994). Asking them to do so through images versus words facilitated the process and valued the role of the visual in their cultures.

By addressing the *evaluative* dimension, I appraised the educational significance of description and interpretation, and through the *thematic* dimension explored the big picture lessons the findings had to offer. I used the images to communicate and support evaluative and thematic findings in the section on student self-concept. As a result of adding the visual images, I was able to avoid the “radical reductionism that characterizes much quantitative description... [and] provide a fine-grained picture of what has occurred or has been accomplished” (Eisner, 2002, p. 189).

## **Data Collection**

### **Teacher participants.**

In deciding on how to select the teacher participants I worked from Noddings’ (2007) view that using people who self-refer and are positive about the content of a study may have a bias, but this bias should be looked at as an asset in exploring best practices, as opposed to a liability. To identify teacher participants, I started at the district or state level and had those teachers interested in collaborating complete a short questionnaire to ascertain their level of commitment to creativity/caring as part of their curricular and pedagogical priorities (Wasser & Bresler, 1996) ([Appendix D](#)).

In Colorado I contacted district arts coordinators for urban, suburban, and rural schools via email. Two out of three urban district coordinators responded and forwarded



my invitation and study summary to the teachers in their districts.<sup>5</sup> Three urban teachers contacted me, but only one pursued participation in the study and completed the online questionnaire. One suburban district arts coordinator replied and sent out invitations to his teachers. Five teachers from his district replied to my invitation; three completed the online questionnaire. I eliminated one of the participants because she taught at the elementary level and another because her responses did not show a strong commitment to the caring behaviors assessed in the questionnaire. For the rural schools, I contacted a volunteer who worked with several schools. She personally contacted teachers in her area she thought would be a good fit. One of the two teachers was in her first year of teaching and felt too overwhelmed to participate; the second teacher also shared that she felt too short of time. It was not until I heard of a teacher from residents of a small mountain community where I spend time that I was able to move forward. I emailed this teacher and never heard a reply. A short time later I met her at the Colorado Art Educator's Association annual conference. She said she simply deleted the email because she was feeling so overwhelmed. After talking with her in person she felt excited about the study and agreed to participate; she completed the questionnaire and I saw her as an excellent fit.

In Western Australia I contacted the government arts education council as well as the professional art teachers' association. The head of the teachers' association I contacted was excited about the study, and through her personal connections with numerous teachers in the state forwarded my information to people whom she thought

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<sup>5</sup> All of the District Arts Coordinator positions for the Colorado districts that responded have since been eliminated due to budget cuts. The urban teacher shared how much his coordinator had helped him and how hard he had to work to gain district support before her. He anticipated and feared her termination.

would be interested and qualified. Five teachers responded to and completed the questionnaire: two rural, one urban, and two suburban. Both of the rural teachers were a good fit based on the questionnaire; the town in which one taught precluded me from including her in the study due to costs associated with travel. The other taught in a rural private school within a four hour drive of the capital of Perth. The urban public school teacher who answered the questionnaire did not have strong enough responses on either the creativity or caring components. Both of the suburban teachers' replies indicated that they would be a good fit for the study and were included, one teaching at a public senior college (years 11 and 12 only) and one in the lower school of a private school for girls (where I observed her teaching years 6 and 7). My original intention was to select only public schools, but as I read the questionnaires and looked at my aim to have a broad perspective, I included the two private school teachers in Western Australia. Additionally, the fact that both private schools were located in Australia fits with the overall educational experience in Western Australia of private schools serving a larger percentage of the population than in the Colorado.

In selecting all of the teachers, consistent communication set the tone for the study. I was responsive to teachers' questions, sent each a summary of the study, and addressed any concerns. I had a sense of their commitment to their students and the study from our correspondence and their questionnaires, and worked diligently to ensure they felt supported each step of the way. Email communications greatly facilitated the process. The time difference between Colorado and Western Australia, as well as the cost associated with calling, made email preferable. I did speak with all of the teachers from

Colorado and Western Australia via phone prior to confirming their participation. I continue to be in contact with most of the teachers.

Gaining approval from their principal's proved an important part of their participation. Most of the teachers acted as liaisons for communication with administrators, although I met all of them when I conducted my observations. The rural Colorado teacher had me communicate directly with her principal in order to finalize approval.

### **Student participants.**

Three to five student participants at each school, 25 students overall, were selected based on observations and conversations with the teachers. Selecting diverse students was a priority, including awareness of gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. Attention to this issue was easier in some of the schools than others, but overall I achieved a strong mix of experiences and backgrounds. I selected students whom the experience in the art class had a significantly positive impact on their lives.<sup>6</sup> I describe the student participants and the classes they took with each teacher in more detail in Chapter Four.

I spoke with each student individually, describing the study, explaining how to talk about the study and go over the "Parent Consent Form" with their parents ([Appendix I](#)), and making sure I answered any questions about the "Minor Assent Form" ([Appendix J](#)). All of the students agreed to participate when I first spoke with them; however, in the suburban Colorado school, two of the students returned the next day and said their

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<sup>6</sup> I address students for whom the art experience might not have been as powerful throughout and commend the topic to others to study in the future.

parents wanted them to concentrate on studying for final exams and asked them to decline the invitation. I worked with the teacher to identify two other students whose parents did consent. All of the students expressed feeling special at being selected and valued. Other students asked how I was selecting students and many others expressed that they wished they could participate. Through my observation methods I was able to elicit their ideas and feelings to some extent and helped them understand why I selected the students I did.

### **Observations.**

I spent one to two school weeks (5-10 days) in each classroom for observations and produced a hand-written record of these observations, which I then fully transcribed. In addition to my classroom and fieldtrip observations, student participants were provided with cameras to capture images that reflected the impact of their art experiences within and beyond the classroom. Since my intention was to understand the impact of the dimensions of caring and creativity from the student perspective, I took notes while I walked around the classrooms and talked with or simply observed the students, attending to their interactions with each other and the teacher, their art production, and general classroom operations. I developed and used conceptual frameworks to guide my observations to reduce the likelihood of skipping over potentially relevant information, as follows: Dimensions of Secondary Visual Arts Classrooms ([Appendix A](#)); Dimensions of Creativity ([Appendix B](#)); and Components of Caring ([Appendix C](#)).

### **Documents, artifacts, and interviews.**

I reviewed: teacher portfolios, memos, curriculum guidelines, lesson plans, tests, rubrics, class rules, brochures, and others as applicable. In addition, I recorded information on relevant artifacts, including: works of art created in the past and during the current school year, news articles in a wide variety of media sources that talked about the arts teacher and/or students being studied, awards/honors received by the teachers and/or students observed (Eisner, 1998). I performed a formal semi-structured interview with each teacher prior to the observations ([Appendix E](#)), spoke informally during the day as needed to clarify what I observed, and 3) communicated via email after teachers read their interview transcripts for additional clarifications and ideas. I also performed a formal semi-structured interview with the three to five students per classroom who completed the photo essays ([Appendix F](#)) and spoke with these and other students informally during the course of my observations. Additionally, I spoke with a couple of parents at the Camden Grammar School who came into class, and the principals or vice principals at all of the schools.

### **Creating Criticisms**

I've discussed the general method of educational criticism above but want to comment on a few key points. Traditionally, educational criticism is a purely literary endeavor, and my formal dissertation is a narrative product reflective of this tradition. I have also constructed a website ([www.creativecaringteachers.com](http://www.creativecaringteachers.com)) to present the findings in a non-linear fashion that allows users to explore personal areas of interest, whether teachers, parents, students, administrators or researchers, without having to

navigate the complex, longer, linear narrative (Goldman-Segal, 1998; Lovejoy & Steele, 2007).

### **Validity in educational criticism.**

Validity in qualitative research generally and educational criticism specifically relies on three different criteria as follows: 1) structural corroboration: the “means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs” (Eisner, 1998, p. 110); 2) consensual validation: “at base, agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics of an educational situation are right” (p. 112), and 3) referential adequacy: the “extent to which a reader is able to locate in its subject matter the qualities the critic addresses and the meanings he or she ascribes to them...when readers are able to see what they would have missed without the critic’s observations” (Eisner, 1998, p. 114). To this end, I shared with the teachers my interpretations and asked them for feedback. They offered additional details and clarifications, but no one completely disagreed or chose to offer alternative interpretations. I also incorporated emic (insider’s) and etic (outsider’s) perspectives to support my work (Berg, 2007). For the emic perspective I presented my findings via an article, a book chapter, and a conference presentation to others in visual arts education to seek their opinions on whether the themes from the study are educationally significant. Reviewers’ comments in all situations indicated that the information was relevant and the themes important for understanding and improving arts education and student success. They commented that attending to students who were less successful would strengthen

my interpretation, and I have addressed their comments in Chapter Five. I also turned to others outside the field of arts education for an etic perspective, by 1) submitting, being accepted, and receiving feedback for a paper presentation on how the findings inform holistic education; and 2) discussing theoretical constructs from a cultural diversity perspective with Maria del Carmen Salazar, Ph.D., an expert in humanizing and culturally responsive pedagogy at the University of Denver (Salazar, 2010). Both perspectives affirmed the value of what I found. I incorporated comments and ideas they shared in framing my theoretical constructs and putting forward my interpretations.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although the study's design includes a diversity of schools and student populations, having five female and only one male teacher, as well as all of the teachers being Caucasian, could be an area to address in future research. Gender also arose as a potential area warranting further examination to explore how male and female students approach art classes, creative work, and communal environment. The distinctions I attended to did not impact what I looked at, but the teachers talked about gender differences in their interviews and further work could be of interest.

Studying schools in urban and rural centers that face greater financial and physical hardships at the school and within the broader community could yield even richer data, as could examining teacher practices and subsequent effects on students living in different countries and cultural contexts. Expanding formal interviews and photo essays to include students who self-identify as having a negative art experience with caring and creative teachers could prove of value. Although saturation occurred during

the observations in most of the schools, more time further removed from winter holiday would possibly have yielded better data at the Madison Senior College in Western Australia. Studying the courses at different times of the year could also inform our grasp of some key elements such as communication, community building, and overall holistic development. Being able to identify a teacher who fit the qualifications and taught at an urban school in Western Australia would have balanced out the observations and strengthened the research. As with any qualitative study, the insights and biases of the observer affect the findings. The more researchers with varied perspectives examine these types of classroom cultures, the better able we will be to augment our overall understanding.

### **About the Researcher**

My varied experiences working with youth and as a mother have shaped my thinking and feelings about the role of education in healthy youth development. I taught over twenty-four different social studies subjects to freshmen through seniors for about ten years, one year in Arizona and almost nine years at a small, lower-middle income, predominantly White high school in Colorado. Concurrent with my teaching, I ran an overnight summer camp for children and teens, aged seven to 16. For the past six years I've also co-owned an art instruction business. Through this program I have taught art privately to children aged four through adults, running classes throughout the year as well as half-day summer camps. In addition to these professional experiences, I have a 17-year-old daughter and a 14-year-old son, which profoundly affects how I view schooling.



Regardless of the setting, I have always believed and my experiences have confirmed for me that students thrive best when they are viewed and supported holistically, integrating but moving beyond purely academic functioning. I have always incorporated performing and visual arts in my instruction, even with my Advanced Placement social studies students. Movement, teambuilding, respect, and open dialogue have also guided my work and proved valuable in helping students and campers thrive. I knew that treating students as complete human beings, deserving of respect and challenge, would help them flourish and create a rewarding learning environment for both me and my students. My master's coursework and thesis in psychology, as well as half my doctoral coursework in psychology, further informed my practice and ideology, driving home the importance of will and motivation on human behavior and success. Living in the two worlds of the classroom and outdoor camping further strengthened my conviction that youth need to move their bodies, get messy, and explore to truly develop as creative, self-motivated, and healthy human beings. I started teaching in 1987 but it wasn't until my coursework in the Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction program that I learned about work that addressed and explained my experiences. The work of Howard Gardner, Elliot Eisner, Nel Noddings, Maxine Greene, Paulo Freire, and others gave voice and credibility to what I'd practiced intuitively and anecdotally for years.

As you read on, it's important know that I am biased against having students sit at a desk all day and record then repeat back information fed to them, regardless of the content area. I hold serious concerns that limiting student freedom to move, make choices, and relate to each other and their teachers stunts their growth as they strive to

become democratically minded, creative, and responsible adults. The visual arts naturally lend themselves to movement and interaction and by showcasing best practices in this area, I hope to provide a model for teachers in other content areas. Additionally, I hope to show that without the visual arts, we will continue to lose students that we might otherwise hook into the system. I also believe that the students we shape form the adult world, as managers, leaders, and decision makers. Stunted growth can affect others around them in negative ways, especially when students attain positions of power. The world is changing and our students need to be able to respond to and shape their future in positive ways that help lift people up instead of holding them down.

## **Chapter Four: Descriptions of Caring and Creative Visual Arts Classes**

### **Mr. Cole**

I first met Mr. Cole via email.<sup>7</sup> He had received the invitation to participate from his district arts coordinator and thought the study looked interesting. From this first contact I had a sense that Mr. Cole felt passionate about his work with students and excited to share. Mr. Cole's questionnaire responses confirmed my feelings and introduced me to his perspectives. He shared that "caring means being a constant, consistent, steady, and compassionate human being." "Constant, "consistent" and "steady" captured what I hoped to see in terms of continuity of care and being present for students in all situations. I wanted to learn more about his perspective and see how these beliefs contributed to Mr. Cole as a compassionate human being. When I talked with him on the phone I could hear the steady manner of his voice, built upon a calm tone and cadence that felt inviting. We agreed upon a timeframe for my observations and interviews, I answered a few questions he had about the study, and we both shared that we were excited to start.

My first exposure to Mr. Cole within the school setting began with the hallway outside his classroom. After checking in at the office and navigating the school to get to Mr. Cole's room, I finally descended a set of stairs. At the bottom of the stairs, the sounds of ROTC drills bounced off the walls to my left and a "person" made out of old

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<sup>7</sup> All teacher and student names are pseudonyms. Additionally, "FS" stands for "female student" and "MS" stands for male student, when pseudonyms are not used.

plastic milk, soda, and other bottles hung on a gray fabric divider wall on the right. The figure had a bow in its “hair” and smiled invitingly. Looking a little further down the hall, I saw that desks lined the corridor, set up in six pairs; two work stations, two students, facing each other per pair. I write that the hallway first introduced me to Mr. Cole because I could tell immediately that it diverged from the norm, that a story lie somewhere behind the arrangement. Mr. Cole arrived shortly after me, having come from the theater where his first period class was working on the set for the play.<sup>8</sup> Short, brown, thinning hair, a wispy mustache and beard, and smiling eyes behind a pair of glasses comprised my first physical image of Mr. Cole. He dressed casually, comfortably, but in a clean fashion, appropriate for the messy world of the art classroom. We talked about the study and dove right into the initial interview, to take advantage of the time before his next class started. At this point, I learned the story of and meaning behind the desks in the hallway and began my journey to know Mr. Cole as a teacher, father, and human being.

### **Clayton City High School**

Clayton City High School, a traditional ninth through twelfth program, is the only high school of a small urban district in a low- to lower-middle income area.<sup>9</sup> The current building was constructed in the 1950’s and is quite worn down, explaining why Mr. Cole and his students were excited to move to a new building in fall 2010. Industrial buildings, a wide state highway, and warehouses surrounded the school on one half, with small, post-World War II homes nestled on the other. Students would cross the wide highway to

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<sup>8</sup> Mr. Cole asked that I not observe this class because it was combined with the theater class, and they were a little overwhelmed getting everything ready.

<sup>9</sup> Appendix K is a chart summarizing all of the demographic information on the sites. Appendix L is a chart summarizing information on the teachers and students. I have placed them on the back page of the dissertation for easy reference.

get to and from school, as well as to go to lunch if they went off campus; a fact they and the teachers said caused them to worry for their safety. Safety issues might be one of the reasons, in addition to free or reduced-meals, the cafeteria was full during breakfast and lunch. Administrators and faculty monitored the hallways on passing periods and during classes, but their presence never felt punitive and served as another source of supportive adult contact. Banners and flyers of where students had been accepted to college, university, or technical school lined the upper walls just outside the post-graduate office in the center commons. About 40% of students will work after graduating, several because Colorado colleges do not yet accept illegal immigrants. Mr. Cole is one of only two art teachers at the school. Of the 1428 students, 73% are Hispanic, 19% Anglo, 3% African American, .007% Asian, and .02% American Indian.<sup>10</sup> Over 21% of the students have a language other than English spoken in the home, and 74.2% qualify for free and reduced lunch. Clayton has a drop-out rate of 10.2%<sup>11</sup> with an enrollment stability figure of 92.1%. Annual academic reporting indicates a ranking of “low” in Overall Academic Assessment, as well as “low” Growth in student improvement.

**Intentions: Self-discovery, voice, and respect.**

Part of Mr. Cole’s motivation for creating meaningful artistic experiences stems from his own encounters with art in high school. “I try to think back...and I don’t remember much...I had a cranky art teacher...What did high school art really mean to me? It didn’t mean much.” He wants to provide his students with meaningful challenges, opportunities that help them flourish as complex thinkers because, as Mr. Cole states,

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<sup>10</sup> The terms employed to describe ethnic groups are those used in school and district documents.

<sup>11</sup> The drop-out rate is a total figure calculated for all four years of high school; the stability figure reports on annual data.

“Modern problem solvers are going to be dual brained, they are going to be endless brained.” To help students tap into myriad facets of cognition, Mr. Cole believes it’s his responsibility to “encourage that they’re trying to develop their own voice.” Enabling students to find their voice requires teaching for creativity and helping students continue to look inward as well as outward. “I really want to see fresh. I talk about fresh, and I talk about things that are new or cutting edge or *avant garde*. I try to explain what that is, and I get excited when I see something.” He wants to help students reveal “something” novel, new, exciting in their final products and purposefully helps them move in this direction:

I think I can show them, I can talk about them, I can give them resources. I think I have a great eye. I have a really great sense of composition and I know what looks good and I try to help them with that.

Mr. Cole believes helping students develop these skills will help them become more emotionally and cognitively developed, happy individuals. Having the technical skills facilitates this development as well, giving them a toolbox of techniques upon which they can draw when trying to represent their ideas artistically. He works hard to create an educational setting that provides students the chance to build up a wide variety of skills, whether ensuring they learn wet film and paper processing or have a broad assortment of materials with which to experiment for drawing and painting.

To help students feel comfortable hearing his input, as well as that of their colleagues, Mr. Cole believes that he must fashion a nurturing environment built on respect:

I try to provide an environment that is welcoming and creative...creating self-respect for other people...I think that respect, for a lot of the kids, comes from mutual respect [of] each other’s artwork, “Wow! That’s really cool” or “That’s

really neat. How did you do that?” And there’s a lot of learning that goes on from student to student; they see what the other is doing, especially in AP class. And, I think that they respect what their peers say.

He hopes that the community he builds allows this type of dialogue and encouragement for students to grow artistically as well as relationally. In regards to relationships, it means never looking the other way when students engage in hurtful behaviors towards each other:

It is just basic human respect, and this is what we work on down here, artistic respect...I think when [kids call someone] “gay” or “ugly,” or whatever, I pounce on that. I hate that. So that is one thing that is a ten for me [on the scale of what I won’t tolerate], you know, just basic disrespect for people.

On an individual level, Mr. Cole wants to see his students:

living life artistically; living life as an artist or bringing art into whatever you end up doing. I think that would bring more joy, perhaps, quality of work. I think that is my goal... I try to break it down into individual kids and their creative [life], or life in general.

This awareness of and attention to the individual and empowering the individual through art permeates Mr. Cole’s intentions. He realizes that he only has so much power and tries to shape the students’ world views to value participation, effort, and connection to each other and the material. This awareness clarifies his role as caring facilitator:

I don’t feel like I can convince them all the time that these may become good opportunities. I think it comes down to the student. If they want to create, and if they don’t; I can try to a certain extent, but I can’t open them up, so I just try to provide that opportunity and help the ones who want to do it.

Having opportunities, seeing themselves as fortunate, despite some of the harsh realities they face everyday, motivates Mr. Cole. His intentions reflect a passion for helping his students see the bigger picture and to discover how fortunate they are in the grander scheme of things:

My first message is that, again, opportunity. What an opportunity they have to be able to study art, you know, to make art and how lucky we are, even if you're feeling unlucky and you're in a bad, tough situation. You still get to come here, and other kids all over the world, do they have that opportunity?

For Mr. Cole, being able to see the big picture takes patience and requires starting with an exploration of self. Every goal he has for his students artistically, relationally, developmentally, holistically begins with the self and enabling the individual to branch out from this point. As he says, "It's all about self discovery."

### **A warm and welcoming space**

The environment Mr. Cole fashioned reflects his desire to create a warm and welcoming space that inspires students and enables them to develop both a sense of autonomy and collegiality. Physically, an institutional feel dominated the space. A low ceiling, made up of speckled acoustic tiles, topped plain white walls which gave way at the base to stained, off-white, blue and green flecked linoleum flooring. Scratches and chipped paint on the main door told of long use and better days. Durable fiberglass pastel yellow, blue, and green chairs, a couple of newer plastic chairs, as well as an old infirmary bed, offered students a place to sit. A metal-rimmed, 8' x 2 ½' table sat smack in the center of the main room, yielding little history of the students who've used it over the past 40 or more years.

On the bulletin board there were official school postings about cap & gown pictures, tornado/fire evacuation procedures (twice), "Board of Education Believes," AP Studio art description poster, and college opportunities/contests/posters. A paper recycling box was located at base of bulletin board and the end of the bookshelf. Aiming for a more artistic feel, Mr. Cole posted samples of contrast filters #1-5 and the statement



“Learn the rules to break the rules.” Everyday supplies were located on top of the bookshelf under the bulletin board in #10 cans: colored pencils, scissors/edgers; staplers; water colors; glue/tape; tracing forms; pencils; tape. The bookshelf itself held books with a wide variety of titles: *Impressionists*, *A-Z of Art*, *Dragonology*, *Self-Portraits*, *Renaissance*, *Art Book*, *Mexico*, *Artist in Studio*, and reference books (dictionaries, anatomy, birds Georgia O’Keefe, Chagall, photography books). Organized chaos describes the bookshelves and storage area, foreshadowing the pending move to a new building.

Work by former students that Mr. Cole has purchased at the district art show each year still hung on the wall, but other work stood stacked against a cabinet, getting ready for the move. The imprint of student life, including names on student lockers, assignments posted on a bulletin board waiting to be graded, and notes to each other on the chalkboard, filled the room. A small, windowed office sat opposite the main entrance, its door never closed to the constant flow of the teacher and students going in and out. Mr. Cole tacked up several mementos on a bulletin board in his office including thank you cards, such as the following (transcribed exactly as written):

Dear Mr. Cole,  
You are a great teacher. Thank you for be nice. Maybe I wasn’t a good student in your class and I should give a little more. But I had fun in your class. Maybe my art is not the best but I notice that it had grow. Thanks for everything you teach me. (The card has erasures, white-out marks, and a different pen was used throughout.)

He also posted, “What a Teacher should do in a Crisis,” a thank you from a citizens group, the visual arts study consent form for my study, a Duck Stamp contest form, the Black Jack Pizza phone number, two notes from future teachers thanking him for letting

them observe his classes, and a nomination for outstanding teacher. Pictures of Mr. Cole's daughter peppered different spaces throughout the office. A tall metal cabinet in the office stores photographic film and paper, as well as other assorted supplies; this cabinet plus two desks in the space left little room for movement. On one of the windows facing the classroom, Mr. Cole posted a "Safe Zone" sign, indicating that students should feel safe talking to him about gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues, and that he will address any discrimination around these issues if they arise in his classroom. Also on the window, students had written notes such as: "Bonjour! Mr. C. from Maria;" "Hello you!" (flanked by two smiley faces); and "Best students! Nancy and Sharon;" "Adopt a senior."

A Macintosh computer sat just outside the office and students used it constantly throughout the day to research ideas, find images for inspiration, check their school email, and on occasion to research topics of personal interest. In a little alcove, where the former infirmary bed sits, were gray lockers, plastic chairs, and a media presentation station where Mr. Cole shows movies to his film studies class and images to the visual arts classes. Directly behind this room, past the center table, a coffee maker sat stocked with coffee, mugs, spoons, and other related accoutrements. Students helped themselves throughout the day, cleaning up the station and their mugs without prompting. Overall, the main section of the classroom felt like a comfortable yet functional old shoe - scruffy but warm when needed.

Additional space in the back housed two darkrooms, three rooms to roll film, and a wet area for clean-up and processing. Film processing containers, pre-mixed chemicals,

film spools, and several signs reminding students about processing times and procedures sat below a large clock and atop a bright orange Formica counter. A box for aluminum-can recycling rested nearby on the floor. Opposite the counter a darkened entrance shrouded by long, black plastic sheets, served as the entry point for two darkrooms. The darkroom on the left housed three enlargers, reserved exclusively for the AP Photography students; to the right a large room with eight enlargers, named for famous photographers (e.g., Ansel Adams, Margaret Bourke-White, Manual Alvarez Bravo), constantly buzzed with students in the other photography classes and those AP students who like the bigger space. Carefully labeled trays of chemicals sat in a long, deep stainless steel sink in the middle of the room. Students reached the trays from both sides and had access to water in a sink running perpendicular to the main unit.

Journeying back to the main room and then out into the hall I saw Mr. Cole's creativity in action. On the walls, next to the clustered pairs of desks, students posted images that motivate and inspire them, as well as sheets labeled, "Concentration" and "Breadth" on which they've taped 2" x 2" images of work they've completed for each section. This extension of space into the hallway turned what would have been a suffocating environment into a personal/professional space. Each workspace reflected the tastes and art of its occupant. Art supplies and projects were strewn over each desk - most seemingly disorderly until the students set to work; then I saw a clear pattern of organization and method unfold. They quickly found the pencils, brushes, or paint they sought. On the wall opposite the work stations, posters from various art schools, institutes, and museums covered a cinder block wall. White dominated every place left

open/untouched by photos and art. Mr. Cole had a small bulletin/white board on which he wrote different announcements, including a countdown to the AP deadline for submission. Two such announcements during my observations were as follows:

5 days!?  
Art show winners!  
Sam: District purchase prize  
Kacy: Best of Show, High School  
Tina: Best 2D, High School  
Maya: Best Photography

AP Studio Art days (countdown has stopped)  
Congrats Federico! 3<sup>rd</sup> place Colorado duck stamp”  
(Finger tracks wipe through parts of the dry erase marker.)

Mr. Cole’s curricular and pedagogical intentions to provide a caring environment informed his attention to the structural and aesthetic dimensions of space; consonance existed between Mr. Cole’s aims and the decisions he made related to these dimensions, with his commitment to the students infusing the setting.

### **Individuality, collegiality, and art production**

Students moved freely and continually throughout the class to meet their needs, which is easier in the smaller classes of 16 students versus the larger ones of up to 22. Whether gathering supplies, bringing photos out of the darkroom to inspect in the light, throwing away trash, recycling pop cans, or getting up to ask Mr. Cole a question, the students did what they needed to do to feel comfortable and attend to their work. Most days Mr. Cole started each class with a quick meeting to review expectations, due dates, or to celebrate accomplishments. The students often responded with light-hearted groans, but they were patient and attributed the meetings to Mr. Cole’s “hippy” roots and “gentle

soul” that make him value community. Their anxiety over the meetings revolved around their excitement to get started, as revealed in the following scenario:

A few students ask, “Can we go work or are you going to say something?

Mr. Cole talks and jokes around.

FS: Mister, I’m really excited [to work]. Are you done?

(Students share photos as they are meeting, excited about what they are producing. They are working on morphing projects where they take two different negatives and morph the images together into one new image.)

FS: You’re holding me back; can I go now? (Jokingly and nicely, but serious at the same time)

Mr. Cole: Yeah

Mr. Cole: You guys can get right to work today.

FS: Sweet!

Mr. Cole: I don’t have any words of wisdom to share with you.

Mr. Cole frequently used humor with the students, and even the conclusion of a meeting offered a chance to make the kids laugh at his silliness, “You can make like a tree (pause) and branch out.” Once the meetings were finished, not all students raced off; sometimes they preferred to hang out a while and talk about what was going on in their lives. Mr. Cole never rushed these students, and generally only nudged them on their way when more than five minutes had passed. His patience allowed important conversations to occur, on topics significant in students’ lives, whether about freedom of speech as related to a school policy prohibiting them from wearing Mexican flag bandanas, or topics closer to home such as family, friends, or personal health issues:

MS: I had surgery on Saturday.

FS: Well stop leaving.

MS: You don’t care.

FS: Maybe I care a lot

(They go on to talk for a few minutes about why the young man had to have surgery.)

FS1: How come you go to the dentist so much?

FS2: I went two times because I have cavities.

FS1: That's a lot. That sucks

(They talk a while about what the procedures were like and how the student who went to the dentist is feeling.)

Not all conversations took place in English. About half the students spoke Spanish or a mixture of Spanish and English when they talked with each other, as well as to Mr. Cole. One of the students asked me at one point how many languages I spoke, and I shared that I could speak French but not fluently, and that I understood French and Spanish. I said she was lucky she was fluent in two languages (Spanish and English). She smiled and said thank you. Students even felt comfortable writing notes to friends in Spanish, such as when a young woman wrote to her best friend in the class: “Te Quiero mucho” and “Yo te amo.” Mr. Cole honored the fact that students were bilingual generating a sense of empowerment in their interactions with each other.

When they did get to work, students sometimes chose to immerse themselves and work alone; other times they reached out to a colleague for instruction, advice, or support. These next two scenarios show how at times art production wholly occupied students' minds and bodies:

A young woman pencils a soldier kneeling by a graveside with his dog. The idea comes from a “six-word” story in her English class and a song she heard on the radio, “Look Me Up after the War.” She sits with her face no more than four inches away from the easel, her hand resting on the paper while her fingers make tiny, one millimeter movements as she adds details the soldier's boot. The fingers on her left hand hold the base of the paper, with an eraser pinched between her forefinger and thumb. A quick cast of her gaze to the sample image is followed by a return to the piece. Rapid staccato strokes, some long, most short, fill in the grass. Longer strokes, exhibiting more pressure, add a little more shadow here, darkened details there. When I return about twenty minutes later, she sits in the same position, continuing to bring forth her vision with pencil on paper.

Kacy applies layer after layer, altering the shading and color to get just the right tone on the Archangel Michael's hand. She tilts her head slightly then mixes and applies the paint, choosing between short and crisp strokes, or longer and

smoother ones. Michael now witnesses the world through piercing blue eyes. She shares that she's working so hard because "it's due for the art show today." Kacy tells me that she normally works in pen or pencil and doesn't like painting because you have to keep mixing for the color. Tape crosses the canvas to mark the lines of the saber in Lucifer's hand. With painstaking slowness, Kacy paints the saber, attending to color, light, and line. She's standing, leaning forward into the piece. After a while she sits, and the power of Lucifer's grip reveals itself. She tilts the top of the painting toward her to add different tones to accentuate and make the saber shimmer. It takes on form and depth, the wedge-like shape of the blade and fine detail of the handle emerging with each new touch of paint. The bell rings; she and most of the other students continue working, as only a few students slowly finish and rise to leave.<sup>12</sup>

Both of these students had the flexibility to work past the time restrictions of the class; one because she had Mr. Cole two periods in a row, and the other because she had obtained permission from her next period teacher. Most students resisted putting away their work and leaving the room, regardless of the period. I continually heard comments such as, "That was the bell already?" or "Are you serious? Are you serious?" Many tried to stay through their next class, something Mr. Cole would only allow after they checked in with their teachers. Sometimes their requests to stay revealed as much about their other classes as they did Mr. Cole's class and their work, for example when a student said, "Can I possibly come down here sixth hour? My next class is boring and I don't even need it [to graduate.]" Students also compensated for the lack of time by coming in before school, staying after school, and taking advantage of the open room at lunch. Structural and pedagogical factors in the rest of the building impacted what happened within the visual arts setting.

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<sup>12</sup> She told me that her painting reflects the Bible story of how Lucifer was kicked out of heaven. A multitude of things inspired her. "Many people think Lucifer was an entity of evil, but he was pure at one time." She wanted her piece to reflect Michael's angst at battling Lucifer. "I'm guessing they must have had a friendship at one time." She paints bat wings to help the viewer understand the difference between Lucifer and Michael. She won best in show at the district art show for her painting.

Sometimes the students wanted to act autonomously and responsibly but didn't yet have the skills to manage their behavior and time. Mr. Cole strove to help students mature in order to find individual success and often worked one-on-one to clarify expectations and let them see that he cares and knows that they can do better. The following scenario typifies several conversations I observed Mr. Cole have with different students:

(Mr. Cole talks with a male student about challenging himself by taking AP Photography next year)

Mr. Cole: I expect you to be here creating.

MS: Is it going to be my own space?

Mr. Cole: It's going to be weird, a little different in the new school, but it's important to be here.

MS: I work well alone. That's why I don't come to class, too many people for me.

Mr. Cole: I want to trust you not to go the bathroom and never come back.

MS: Yeah, I want to earn that trust.

Trust was as an important theme for the students, and I will share comments from the interviews a little later to further emphasize this point. Ultimately, students had to trust themselves to make good decisions because Mr. Cole held high expectations for them to do so. He wouldn't respond punitively when they violated his trust, but gently applied guilt instead, to remind them that they had the ability and responsibility to control their own actions and make appropriate choices. He trusted students to take the supplies they needed but no more, to sign out a camera and return it in good condition, and to make a mess while deep in the process of art production and clean it up. This feeling of trust was evidenced clearly in Mr. Cole's decision to allow students to use their cell phones and MP3 players freely. Students decided as individuals if they wanted to listen to music while they worked and almost always did so with only one ear bud in at a time so they could still interact with their peers and Mr. Cole. They would also send and receive



texts on their phones, always very quickly, but never gave up enough time to have a phone conversation. Getting their work done and taking advantage of class time took priority, but they had control and self-regulated their usage, quite responsibly based on what I observed. As a result of mutual trust and respect, students responded positively to Mr. Cole and the overall environment and felt free to regulate the flow and timing of their work.

Some days when students were less productive, they told me that they just couldn't think, had a stressful night, or needed a break. Mr. Cole always checked in but never stressed when this happened because he kept on top of their work and knew when to push and when to back off. An intimate knowledge of student backgrounds often informed his decision on when to get involved and helped him establish goals for each individual. With one student, Mr. Cole felt satisfied to see him coming to class and taking small steps to complete various paintings or charcoal drawings. Mr. Cole told me that this young man, a sophomore, was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and depression, and that by working with his counselor and other teachers they've helped him feel safe at school, a huge feat given past experiences. His work displayed quality, talent, and thought-provoking insights, and I learned in talking with the young man that he's quite passionate about art and comes to school each day because of this class. Mr. Cole supported and offered advice as needed but let him completely immerse himself in his work or meander and interact with his peers when he'd had enough. The young man talked about sometimes feeling bored and not being able to think, and that he would get upset at himself because he couldn't get any ideas. He said that it felt like a miracle when he got

the idea for the painting he submitted for the art show. Mr. Cole understood how deeply the young man thought about the world and empathized with his pain. A poem the young man shared with me indicates that Mr. Cole's observations hit the mark:

*Glass Mask*

I wore a mask day in and day out  
to keep secrets of my feelings.  
Boys and girls would try to speak to me  
but I only show them my mask.  
My boss told me that my fairy disguise  
would rub off on me.  
I continued with my mission to make them  
laugh with me.  
I wore a mask day in and day out.  
The mask broke and like so many moths my  
secrets flew out. So frail was my glass mask  
now everyone looks down upon this sad clown.

For another student, Mr. Cole applied more pressure to help her finish everything she had to submit for the AP examination. He talked with me about her home life and described her as “the youngest daughter but not the favorite.” Mr. Cole assumed there is drinking by the parents, and in his assessment she struggles because she is “trying to grow up real fast,” a factor in her not coming to class. When she would come, I saw a positive, collaborative relationship between her and Mr. Cole. In one instance, Mr. Cole talked with her about a photo montage she was making; they brainstormed on effect and what to name the piece. She communicated her desire to create a fairytale feel; he listened, took in what she had to say and offered advice on how to improve the quality of the image through attention to detail with the tone, composition, and crispness of the images. Mr. Cole had this same type of personal knowledge and collaborative interaction most strongly with students he'd had for more than one semester, but he still knew a great

deal about students he had not taught as long. His interactions were not always perfect, but the respect and trust he'd built with them allowed them to dialogue with him openly and even call him to the carpet when he could do better:

(An FS talks about her pictures with Mr. Cole.)

FS: See that's your problem, you're always jumping to conclusions. You need to listen.

(She says this with a funny voice and hand/facial expressions, and he helps her resolve her problem.)

Additionally, even having a close relationship did not always ensure students would succeed. At one point I observed a student who smelled of alcohol. I even overheard him reply to another student, "I'm not an alcoholic." When I spoke about the scenario with Mr. Cole, he said that he was aware of the situation and had been working with the young man's counselor and family to help him. Importantly, the young man ditched art class less frequently and always tried to complete some work. Life can often loom larger and more powerful than a teacher's best intentions and efforts.

On a couple of occasions, stories the students shared with me helped Mr. Cole learn even more about them. For example, one afternoon, I sat with Dana, a Photography 3/4 student, as she assessed a photo she had printed. She told me that the photo felt "powerful. Like his eyes. Reminds me - when you think of our grandfathers, Aztecs long ago. You can tell we are them. It makes me think about how the future will reflect us." I share that I think her thoughts are touching and powerful. After we are finished, Dana says, "Thank you miss," because it meant a great deal to her that I truly valued what she had to say. When I told Mr. Cole the story it amazed him and made him proud that students could express pride in their cultural background and have such deep insights.

In addition to building his own relationships, Mr. Cole encouraged and nurtured collegiality between the students. The meetings each day built a sense of community, especially when Mr. Cole focused on student achievements to celebrate:

Mr. Cole goes over the awards that the students earned at the art show last night. Sam won the purchase prize (the district bought his picture of a school desk). Everyone celebrates. “That’s good!” Federico nods and says, “Put some pressure on him to continue art.” Fellow students clap and Ben gives him thumbs up. One of Tina’s long-necked portraits won for painting and Maya won an award for her photography self-portrait. Kacy won best of show; everyone claps for her. She and her dad were at the show. Brittany, a student from last year who was visiting on a day off from her new school, “oohs” and “aahs,” and says that she hates her new school.

In addition to modeling how to honor and celebrate hard work, Mr. Cole modeled how to work creatively with another person. The one-on-one time he spent with students taught them how to do collaborate with each other; they trusted their artistic instincts and judgements as a result of feedback from Mr. Cole and valued the opportunity to work with their peers in the same way. They would serve as subjects for photographs, help tint black and white photos, and collaborate with each other on creative and technical decisions. Because he majored in photography and not drawing and painting in college, Mr. Cole encourages his students to share their expertise with each other.<sup>13</sup> For example, Daniel, a young man in the AP Studio class, was teaching his peer, Federico, how to use Sharpie markers and pencil:

Daniel: You can do white anywhere; put your highlights. It’s all up to you, but like with hair, I found it’s easier to do all black then add white for the hair. (Federico is still working on a practice paper. Daniel gets out pencils to share.)

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<sup>13</sup> Mr. Cole also brings in outside experts in person or via the internet and multimedia presentations he puts together for the students.

They worked next to each other for a while, Federico learning the technique, frequently asking questions, and having his “mentor” assess how he was doing. They felt comfortable with and trusted each other. At one point, Daniel asked Federico to don a gasmask he’d brought in for his project:

Daniel tells Federico he’s going to be his gasmask guinea pig.

Federico: No.

Daniel: You’re using my Sharpies.

Federico: Can I be called a sidekick instead?

Daniel: Yeah

(Federico puts on mirrored sunglasses and the gas mask. Daniel takes a picture.)

Federico walks up to Lila and she says, “Nice dude. Tight.” (She thanks him for something he did for her and gets back to work.)

A few important things appear out of this short scenario: 1) Daniel felt comfortable asking for help; 2) Federico had the option to say no, and when he was reminded of his responsibility to the relationship, felt safe to advocate for himself and ask to be a “sidekick;” and 3) it was okay to be funny and walk around and engage with other classmates. Students were safe to negotiate and practice relationships, all under the umbrella of creativity and visual art production. Sometimes to ensure emotional safety, Mr. Cole would have to intervene. The students, as well as Mr. Cole, shared a story about two students in the AP class who had been best friends but had a falling out. At the beginning of the dissolution of the friendship, Mr. Cole had to step in when they started yelling at each other. He persisted and taught them the importance of respect, even in such an emotionally charged situation. By the time of my observations, I would never have guessed at the previous animosity. The two students were cordial and even helped each other on occasion. Again, students had a teacher who modeled and taught them how to care for others in meaningful ways.

Sometimes students helped each other out of necessity, especially in the larger classes, or when Mr. Cole had to devote time to matting student work for the art show and AP portfolios.<sup>14</sup> Every class period consisted of students collaborating with, teaching, and assisting each other in various ways. I observed students instructing their peers on how to use filters, make test strips, cut out pages in an altered book, upload pictures to the College Board site, and use their school email. A slow patience pervaded the times when students work together. No one rushed an explanation, even if they had to put aside their work a little longer, or talked while they were working. Sometimes two students worked together to figure out how to do something, failed, and tried a different strategy. Other times they simply kept each other company. The following scenario depicts an example of student-to-student bonding over the painstaking, often dull, procedure of film processing:

FS1: Which step are you on? The developer?

FS2: I got about 3 more minutes.

FS1: I got six.

(Time goes by; they pace back and forth, shaking their canisters, switching hands frequently. They both settle into the calm of the process, uninterrupted by and not needing extraneous conversation.)

FS1: Four minutes

FS2: I have half a minute. My arm hurts.

(They carefully slosh the fixer over the film by shifting the canister up and down, top to bottom.)

FS2: One more minute.

(Their eyes are on the clock; a tired arm swings like a pendulum forward and back.)

FS2 to FS1: “Like this,”( as she demonstrates how to shake, not just swing her

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<sup>14</sup> The fact that Mr. Cole was busy and had to prioritize his time to prepare student submissions affected his relationship with and behavior toward students. One student told me that right now he’s “the hater,” because “he’s just stressed. He wants us to get the AP done. Next week he’ll be back to a lover.” Students had an opportunity to experience the ups and downs of their teacher and experience the nuances of relationships in action. Care didn’t emerge as stereotyped, sanitized relations, but complex affairs full of give and take.

arm.)

FS1: My arm hurts. This is like the most boring part.

FS2: Yeah, I hate that.

(When they finally finish, both young women celebrate the rich negatives that come out of the canisters. Success helps them quickly move past the process.)

Whether boring or enlivening, students embraced each task because they had learned to trust the process set out by Mr. Cole and their ability to help each other do things correctly. They felt a sense of self-efficacy as a result of what they learned. This facet of his art class contrasted sharply to how students perceived their ability to learn in other classes. I heard them talk about feeling successful in English, but time and again they talked with each other about how little they learned in their math and science courses which frustrated them:

(An FS and MS talk about math class being boring.)

MS: [The teacher] goes too fast; I don't get it.

FS: I don't either.

I wonder if some of the supportive behaviors, practice opportunities, and patient, well-paced instruction I observed in art class might improve instructional opportunities and ultimately alter their perceptions about math.

Students also helped each other with more mundane tasks. I observed one student spill a large amount of liquid and another student nearby jumped in without hesitation to help her clean up. Students would help each other put away supplies, throw away trash, or simply move over so someone else could join them at the work table. Simple, everyday, genuinely human needs and experiences had a place and helped students feel comfortable and supported.

This feeling of comfort shaped the way in which students responded to inevitable mistakes, such as forgetting to decrease the light aperture on the enlarger and

overexposing their image, or applying paint too thickly for a desired effect. They expressed their frustration in ways that fit their personalities, whether quietly fuming, broadcasting their disappointment to the entire class, or humorously tapping their foreheads against the wall. On occasion Mr. Cole had to remind them that they were “free to use the language you feel comfortable with, but please.” After their frustration subsided, students would get into gear and either asked someone to help them figure out what they did wrong or found a solution on their own. Most significantly, they always kept going, trying something new. Mr. Cole made certain to order sufficient supplies to allow for mistakes and experimentation; he also had mechanisms in place for students to purchase additional supplies for very little money, so as not to stifle their ability to explore and produce works of art.

Feeling safe to experiment and try new things, without worrying about materials (but still working from the ethic Mr. Cole instilled of not being wasteful), led to vastly unique outcomes. Despite the same assignment and beginning materials, students ended up with wildly divergent interpretations and finished products. An assignment on spring yielded the following photographic images: raindrops on a car window; a baby lying on a blanket; a snowy field; and buds on a sinewy branch. Mr. Cole consciously taught students how to go past their first idea and find another, then another. As he told his students during class one day, “When photographing mundane or banal things, I want you to make them beautiful, to see them in a different way.” In addition to conceptual strategies, students played around with technical methods to stretch their creativity. One student experimented with double-exposure techniques to morph her face onto a tree,



nestle it among swirling leaves, and imprint it upon a brick wall. Another student delighted in discovering the macro lens to capture the beauty of the human body and the richness of skin to evoke emotion and story. All of the students engaged in similar experimentation, and, significantly, the longer they had taken Mr. Cole, the more likely they were to take risks. They were also more likely to look at their immediate surroundings differently, whether saving a candy wrapper for an altered book project, using brick walls for the backdrop of a photograph on emotion, or making a completely new image out of old test strips; his students challenged assumptions and looked at things in new ways. Attention to tactile and visual sensation facilitated new interpretations, such as using objects other than a brush to paints to evoke texture or making a shadow box picture to display a photograph and three dimensional mementos from the picture's location. One student described the evolution of her thinking on self-portraits and photographing the human body:

Maya's specialty is self-portrait. With one particular image she wanted a wet kind of look and smeared her make-up to make it dark looking, with intentional lighting to create shadows. You see her face propped on her hands which are on the edge of the bath tub. "I like photo because it's something really interesting. [You] can choose light outside and in the darkroom. Not everybody photographs the same things. I like hands, people, faces. I like the texture of skin."

I observed Mr. Cole share his own photographs to inspire students and help them view the world differently, and they shared that seeing his work inspired them and encouraged them to try new things.

The students' skill and creativity, as well as Mr. Cole's openness and warmth, drew others not in his visual arts classes into the fold. Friends of classmates, or even students simply walking down the hall, would stop, talk, and admire student work,

especially the work of AP students in the hallway. Students from the ROTC program dropped by on occasion to see if Mr. Cole needed help with anything and would express how talented they thought the students were. Sometimes former students or friends of current students just wanted to hang out in the art room. They respected the rules that guided everyone's behavior, knowing that students valued their work time and did not want anyone to interfere. For example, one student had his cousin come to class. Right upon walking in the door he said to Mr. Cole, "I'm here; I'll stay out of trouble."<sup>15</sup> Students shared that they felt special when they could show friends their artwork. These visits also brought out a sense of how important art class was for the students, such as when Daniel shared with his friend, "It's the only class I like. All my other classes are lame."

### **Student perceptions: A home away from home**

To understand Mr. Cole, the impact he has on his students, and their perceptions of the classroom environment he creates, I turn to student voices to put the finishing touches on my description. I present responses from the student interviews which reflect the collective viewpoints they all shared. They show how students valued the give and take of the caring relationship they had with Mr. Cole; the freedom to create; the ability to help and be helped by others; and the little details that informed their lives. Just as Mr. Cole empowered them and wanted to help them find their voices, I defer to their wisdom

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<sup>15</sup> He was in the teacher cadet program and didn't have it that day.

and insights to convey how their visual arts experiences with Mr. Cole made them feel each day.<sup>16</sup>

*A home away from home.*

All of the students expressed that the art room felt like their home, a special place they could call their own, find inspiration, settle in to a routine, and feel safe. Having such a place in school took on extra significance in that most of the students expressed that most of their other classes felt very alienating. Finding success in other areas proved difficult and, even if they were successful, they didn't feel liberated and empowered in the process.<sup>17</sup>



I don't think I can compare this environment to my other classes, because I feel comfortable in this class. They have couches here and it's comfortable. Like, my desk, I feel like it's my home when I'm away from my original home. I guess to me, all I really want is art. I have my art space; there's probably days where I feel, I don't feel motivated to draw and I just come and sit down there and just think of ideas, brainstorm. I feel comfortable here; I don't think I can compare that to any other class because I don't have that comfortability. ~Federico, AP Studio student

Figure 2. *A home away from home.*(Federico)

Well, when we're all together it's really happy, and we all laugh. And when we're all working it kind of chills out, but we still talk; and, it's just a good group of people for the class. ~Daniel, AP Studio student

Well in our other classes, we don't really have our own space; there're just assigned seats. And in this class, it's pretty much our classroom. In the darkroom we like pick our certain printer that we want to use, and we pick what enlarger we want, and it's just better because we have our own space. And we have our own locker to put our stuff in. In other classrooms you have to carry it with you in your

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<sup>16</sup> I have modified some of the photos to remove people for whom I did not have signed permission to use their image, or to enhance the image for printing.

<sup>17</sup> Nina took a photo of her English teacher and shared that she felt inspired by her and the classroom for the very same reasons she did in Mr. Cole's class. This teacher trusted the students, pushed their thinking, and believed in them.

backpack, so you don't really have your own space to work at. It's just more comfortable, you can work better at your own space. ~Maya, AP Photography and Photography 2/3 student

***Mr. Cole.***

Themes of trust, respect, support, kindness, and caring recurred throughout the interviews when the students talked about Mr. Cole. They perceived him as a authentic person who genuinely cared for them and worked hard to ensure they maximized their potential. Additionally, students admired his creativity and the way in which he encouraged them to push the envelope in their own work. They saw him as a role model, someone who puts forth his best effort and expects them to do the same because they're worth it.

I think he does care because when we had our sub, some of the students left early. [The next day] Mr. Cole said that he trusts us to walk around or be outside in the hall because we're working wherever we walk. He gives us that trust and he gives us space. And then he said that if we didn't follow those rules that he wouldn't have that trust with us. He said he would be like any other teacher; he would make us stay just in this room. I just think that if we didn't respect him or behave, if we didn't behave good, he wouldn't really give us the independence. ~Dana, Photography 2/3 student

I think he's a really fun, nice person. Sometimes he may get a little cranky when he's overstressed, but I think he's really good, you know he really helps us. Sometimes I'll get mad when he critiques our pictures, but I understand that what he tells us is going to make it much better than how it already was. ~Nina, AP Photography student

He's always setting goals for us just to be better and better every time. He doesn't want us to stay where we were at the beginning. He knows that we can do much, much better and that we should do it, and he doesn't give up on us, and you know it makes us mad (laughing). ~Nina, AP Photography student

If you don't show you care, he's not going to care as much. He can tell when people really care about this class, and if they're just doing it to get the class done. So if you really care, he will talk to you about each project. But if you don't care, he'll try to show you what you need to do it, but he's not going to force anything

because if he forces it, it's just going to turn out crappy. ~Daniel, AP Studio student

He does care about everyone. He doesn't sit there and just think of what's going on in his life. If he has to help someone individually about their problems at home or anything, he'll listen, he won't judge anyone; he'll just listen and understand why they can't do their assignment. I was having some problems at home. I was moving and I couldn't do three assignments, and he was like, "Oh, well, it's okay; just try to work on something else that doesn't really take up a lot of your time at home right now." ~Dana, Photography 2/3 student



I don't know; it's like he's really passionate about what he does. He's really into it. He may not be an artist, but as a photographer he's really motivated as much as we are. I don't know, probably because I've been with him for quite a while it feels like, he's like family I guess you could kind of say. I feel close to him because he knows what I've gone through, and stuff like that, so I feel really close to him. ~Federico, AP Studio student

Figure 3. Mr. Cole (Federico)<sup>18</sup>

Some of the AP students, like Sarah or Nancy, they'll like to talk to him about their weekend or stuff that they did, or just problems that they have at home 'cause we're closer to him than any other teacher because we've had him all year, because AP starts like at the beginning of the year and goes all three terms. ~Maya, AP Photography student

I really like the way he works with us because he teaches us how to do lots of things. Sometimes during AP, he might go a little bit towards art and then he'll come back to photography, so that's kind of hard. Like in the AP class having both art and photo, it's kind of hard, but I think it balances out in the end, and we get help. ~Nina, AP Photography student

He's a hippy (laughs), green, just chill, kind of has his own thoughts; he just kind of goes with it. He can be mean and get down with you alone and tell you, "You got to get this done," but most of the time he's just chill and lets you do what you need to do. ~Daniel, AP Studio student

If somebody doesn't understand something, he'll do whatever to make sure they understand it, and I think he really connects with everyone. He'll talk with us all at once, but then individually he has a connection with every single student. ~Dana, Photography 2/3 student

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<sup>18</sup> I only included photographs of teachers if the students took them for their photo essays.

I think he tries to match the art we do with who we are, our personality. He talks to us about why we did it. It feels like we're in a sort of psychology environment, because he listens to us. He won't like judge us or anything, but he'll ask us what's wrong or why do you feel like this. It's really good because it helps us. If we're frustrated about not being able to do a picture right, with that talk it will liberate us from that stress. ~ Nina, AP Photography student

Because I like how Mr. Cole gives assignments, but he doesn't specifically tell you details of what to do, so that's what I like about it. We all have the same assignments, but we all learn different stuff but it's actually like the same thing. For me it's always been like trying to do something that no one else has done before. That's one of the things that everyone in here concentrates on, you know, doing something original. 'Cause Mr. Cole doesn't really like stuff that you would see everywhere else. He wants us to be unique and I think that's one of the reasons everyone is here. He gives you a lot, a lot of freedom to do with the project. ~Dana, Photography 2/3 student

He has a lot of training, and he took photography in college. And his pictures are really, really good. So when he shows his pictures it's weird to see them because I didn't really expect him to take that good of pictures. And then when he shows us, he's just really creative. He puts a lot of thought into his work. It gives me ideas, not to copy, but he shows us techniques in the darkroom. And then what looks good with colors, with blue tone and with tan colored pictures, or sepia tone. He gives us advice on what he thinks looks good. He critiques our work and then, I think that's good because I need to improve. ~Maya, AP Photography and Photography 2/3 Student

***Supportive, caring, and creative learning community.***

Mr. Cole modeled effective communication and how to relate to others and worked hard to help students treat each other kindly as well. Students held onto this aim and made it their own by acting as connoisseurs of their relationships and creative processes. They viewed everything from friendships, to hard work, to little details in their environments differently because of their time with Mr. Cole and each other. They also saw themselves in a new light because of how they helped others and strove to be and do their best.

We have learned to critique each other's work and help each other out. Because when we can't get the teacher's help, we go to each other and then we use the education he's given us about photography, or art, and with that we give advice to the other students. ~ Nina, AP Photography student

I feel more comfortable with my art to do whatever. I don't have to worry that I can't do something. A lot of other art teachers, like they usually tell you what they want, and you do their method. Like when we did have [specific] projects, assignments, he'd tell us you have to do self portrait, but you can do anything, anything. And then when we did the acrylic mixed with water color, we could do anything, but it had to be out of focus, the background. With me, I don't like to draw unless I have some guidelines, because I'm not good at making up out of nowhere; so I like someone to give me an idea, and I can make it my own. ~Daniel, AP Studio Art student

I know it's unique because every single time I come to school it's what I'm really looking forward to. I come to this class, because, I don't know, I express myself a lot through my artwork, even though you have to guess at what I'm trying to express. So, I can't wait to come here because I feel free. I don't feel pressured; in some of the classes you have to, have to do this, but here, it's more free. You get to draw what you want and how you want to explain it, and you know, it's due at certain times, like any other class, but I mean it's understandable. That's what makes it unique, especially because I get to show my talent, which makes me feel special. ~Federico, AP Studio Student

We have a lot of like freedom, and we can do just whatever we want as long as it's what we're supposed to do. I don't think he's ever told anyone, "That's not what you were supposed to do." I remember we were supposed to take pictures of someone, just sections, their face, and then this part, and then their legs, and their feet. And I think someone didn't have time to do that, so they photographed bottles of detergent like a person, and he accepted that; he actually liked it and I think it ended up in an art show. ~Dana, Photography 2/3 student

We just care about each other and how we're doing. If someone's not doing right we try and help them out. ~ Nina, AP Photography student

There are small things; you can make a rock into something really creative in a picture. Before I would just take pictures of just faces and stuff, and then I took AP art. I didn't take pictures of objects, or any stuff like that, and now I can make them into something. ~Maya, AP Photography student

We can just talk to each other. It's really comfortable. We can just talk about anything. We all get along; nobody really gets mad at each other. So we can just talk about anything. Sometimes, I ask them if they had an idea, and then I'll take their idea and mix it with mine. ~Daniel, AP Studio student



Figure 4. Friends can help you creatively (Nina)

Well, that picture, that was taken because friends have a lot to do with this stuff, you know they help you a lot. If you have a question about something, or you don't exactly know what to take a picture of, they can help you and give you ideas. ~Nina, AP Photography student

Yeah, because like other times, in other classes, I just don't enjoy doing math; I, like, I'm horrible at it. But this, I don't care what the work is, I'll do it, and it doesn't bother me 'cause I don't feel like it's work; it's something I would do anyway. ~Dana, Photography 2/3 student

### *Artistic life.*

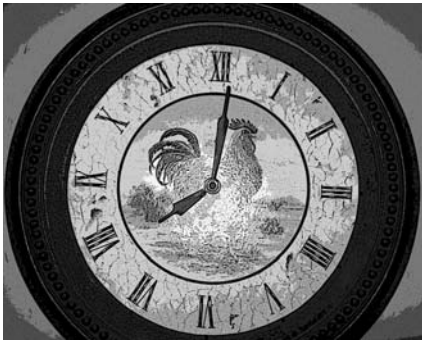
Students laid bare the intimate connection between art and a holistic sense of self, whether integrating the visual arts with music and dance, or strengthening interpersonal connections as a result of the artistic process. Art went far beyond the confines of the classroom and enriched their lives as a result.

I guess it's trying to master the techniques. I barely started painting this year, but I've come so far from my first painting, to my last painting. And I guess it's like trying to capture the color that makes it so difficult. It's challenging to make colors blend. And there's times where we try a different technique, try to get it to look good the first time because we know that the drawing that we're going to do is going to be important for our portfolio, or just important in general. ~Federico, AP Studio student

It would be different if I didn't have two classes with him, because I would only have it 3<sup>rd</sup> block. If I didn't finish something 3<sup>rd</sup> block, I would have to wait until photo class the next day to keep working on it. But since I have two photo classes, I can work on it in this class. ~Maya, AP



A lot of people, a lot of people they go home and they see things different, like from the way they would have seen it here, and then they'll just think of something else to do. I think the way everything works in their house, like I guess the advice their parents give them for stuff, I think it could make them do something different than what they were supposed to do. ~Dana, Photography 2/3 student



*Figure 5. Work takes time (Maya)*

[I took a picture of] the clock because it takes time to achieve what you want. You can't just rush everything. It takes time to be in AP and to get better at the things you want to achieve; it takes time, to get to a higher level. ~ Maya, AP Photography and Photography 2/3 student



*Figure 6. Federico's brother break dancing (Federico)*

That's my little brother. He's so good at stunts and doing break dancing things, and I never really got to take a picture of my break dance crew that I have, but I got to take this picture of him. You've seen one of my artworks of break dancing, and I wanted to show that break dancing is my motivation too; it's important to me. I'm passionate about break dancing and drawing, so I wanted to bring them together. ~Federico, AP Studio student

**Ms. Carter**

Ms. Carter's choice of font for her email exuded a blithe manner and positive energy, as did her words and punctuation. She'd learned about the study from her district arts coordinator. Having just finished her master's thesis, Ms. Carter believed it was important for teachers to participate with researchers trying to understand and improve education. This belief, coupled with the fact that the study was examining caring and creativity, a primary emphasis for Ms. Carter, led her to follow up on the invitation. Her responses to the open-ended questions on creativity and caring in the questionnaire indicated why the study may have resonated with her, as they were complex, well-developed ideas that valued the role of relationships and self-identity in both. Ms. Carter writes that "Creativity is the ability to take risks, explore, think intrapersonally and interpersonally- a unique awareness of self and others and our relationship with the world." Her answer suggests that technical skill and manipulation thereof would not suffice. This intra- and interpersonal emphasis came through in her definition of caring as well, as she writes, "Caring is an innate ability to reach out to others in such a way that reflects their needs, desires, likes, dislikes... as a priority- a safe place that has one's best interest in mind with an empathetic attitude." When I spoke with her on the phone to arrange my visits, I could discern these beliefs even in our short conversation by the way in which she focused on the students' role in the study and how she could help me move forward.

### **Palomino High School**

Approximately 40 miles southeast of Clayton City High School, open fields border single family homes of middle- to upper-middle class families. Perched on a vast hill, amongst the fields and homes, rests Palomino High School also a ninth through twelfth grade high school. Farm and ranch land lay a little further south, but most of the students live in neighborhoods within six miles of the school. The building mirrors the two-story, single building architectural model adhered to throughout the district. The rigorous college preparatory program guides most instruction, with over 90% of students going to college or university. Ms. Carter teaches along with five other visual arts teachers who subjects include jewelry, graphic design, photography, sculpture, and painting and drawing, amongst other sub-specialties. Over 2,100 students attend Palomino, 85.5% White, 8% Hispanic, 3% Black, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and .005% American Indian. Just 4.1% of the students live in homes where a language other than English is spoken, and only .8% of students qualifies for free and reduced lunch. Enrollment stability is 95.6%. Palomino ranks as “high” on their Overall Academic Assessment and “low” for student Growth in performance.

#### **Intentions: Tell me what you’re trying to say.**

Whether talking with Ms. Carter, reading her educational philosophy statements, or examining her lesson plans, her intentions about helping students develop their individual voice and abilities as conceptual artists stand out. Like Mr. Cole, Ms. Carter believes in developing the whole person through the artistic process and the social

environment of the art classroom. When asked about her goals for the students, Ms.

Carter states the following:

Just to enjoy art and to recognize that they have very powerful things within themselves that they can share, and they can share it visually, they can share it written, they can share it in various ways, musically, but that art's a wonderful way to share what they have inside of themselves that's valid, that's important, and that needs to be heard. I really try to say, "You have a voice. Tell me what you're saying. Tell me what you're trying to say." I think that kids need to hear that, that what they have to say is important, and it's honored, and it will be honored.

The theme of voice, first identifying what they want to say and then being empowered to say something artistically, resonated with Mr. Cole as well. To help students find their voice, Ms. Carter writes conceptual lesson plans that focus on student emotions, passions, cultures, and more. For example, in the "Shake your worries away: Pinch pot shaker" lesson, Ms. Carter has students write down worries on strips of paper that they put into the center of pinch pots of their own design and shape. When the pieces are fired the worries burn off in the kiln. She reveals her intentions for conceptual thinking by turning a basic skill development lesson into a meaningful exploration of self.

Ms. Carter also strives to create a warm and supportive environment in which sharing thoughts and feelings is possible. As she writes in her educational philosophy statement:

Teacher and students are in constant partnership. Together with kind hearts and strong minds a secure foundation is established for learning about self, others, and educational disciplines...Leading by teacher example invites students into a balanced relationship. Here mutual respect, security, and excitement are facilitated. Student self-esteem will be built as well as creative individualism, a safe and secure environment both mentally and physically.

These sentiments were echoed during our conversations and formal interview. Building a supportive environment driven by respect is a central aim for her, as she says, "I hope in

my classroom it's a place where they learn to accept and honor everybody. And that's kind of a big thing I really strive to do."

As students develop voice and construct community, Ms. Carter believes they will be better able to take creative risks. Relationships and creativity are bound together. Ms. Carter appreciates the fact that she is responsible for developing a place for creative interaction; as she says, "I...try to open my classroom to all possibilities so creativity can soar."

As with Mr. Cole, skills serve as the foundation, the confidence building element that helps students branch out in creative directions. Actually making a product that reflects student concepts, making the private public, is an essential part of the process for Ms. Carter:

I want them to know, I want them to be able to tell their parents and their parents to say, "How did you make this?" I don't want, "I don't know. I did what she said." I want them to be able to say, "This is how I made it. This is what I used." And when they say, "This is how I made it," then they can say, "Then I used a serrated rev, and then I used flip." And their parents are like, "What's a flip?" And they'll be able to tell them. I want them to be able to tell back what they, they've created and why.

Ms. Carter believes that this self awareness of the artistic process shapes students' confidence and personal identities. By grappling with and mastering artistic methods in the class, Ms. Carter hopes they learn more about themselves and have a greater appreciation for art in the world:

My overarching hook is to give them the appreciation for art. I don't care if they become an artist, I don't care if they go into art, but I want them to always appreciate art so that they realize that it's around them, and they start to question why, what is, I want them to question what is art, why is it important, how does it relate to people and society.

By creating their own artwork she hopes that her students will look at their world in new ways and understand more about humanity and themselves in the process.

Ms. Carter believes that confidence with skill development and a willingness to take creative risks stems from the warm environment and caring community she strives to develop:

I talk a lot about how this is really important to me, getting to know you. Because getting to know you makes me a better teacher. And you're going to get to know each other. And I talk about how art is a personal thing, a reflection of self, and if that is the case, then this is a safe environment. [It's also important to] be myself, being secure, and I make mistakes, and that's okay. I think modeling is a huge aspect of creating that safe environment.

She hopes by modeling and ensuring everyone knows each other and students accept people for who they are that she will create a warm and inviting place students want to be and feel safe creating. Ms. Carter also states that, "I also want them to have ownership of the classroom, so that's a big thing for me." She hopes that by giving them control over the space and their roles within that space they make her art room a place that makes them happy and provides a sense of belonging.

### **The art room as canvas.**

Palomino High School rose before me, a vast, sprawling structure significantly newer than Clayton High School. The tight security at the school stood in stark contrast to Clayton, where I simply walked in through the cafeteria, went to the main office, obtained a pass, and headed downstairs. When introducing me to his vice principal, Mr. Cole easily obtained a parking and visitor pass that I held onto for the entire two weeks of my observations as well. At Palomino I had to show my driver's license and sign in and out each day. In contrast to an interior bereft of sunlight found in most of Clayton,

Palomino had bright, wide hallways, filled with light shining in from windows lining most of the roofline of the second floor. The halls overflowed with predominantly White, English-speaking students as they moved to their next class. Unlike the inviting recycled objects person who greeted me at Clayton, I had to navigate my way down a dark, narrow hallway, once out of the main hall, to find Mr. Carter's office. Three classrooms had doors connecting to the hallway, in addition to the door to the office shared by three of the six art teachers in the building.

Once in the office, I could see Ms. Carter's influence. Light periwinkle blue walls served as the background for some of Ms. Carter's own conceptual work. Rows of neatly stacked books lined the shelves above the teacher work spaces. A full-sized refrigerator stood sentinel by the door to the classroom, and windows looked out over the hallway from which I entered, the jewelry room adjoining Ms. Carter's, and her ceramics classroom. Ms. Carter greeted me warmly, and we sat and chatted. She has a slight build and reddish-brown hair that falls to shoulder-length. An endless smile beamed across her lightly freckled face. She spoke with a soft but firm voice that invites one to listen, especially when she talked about her belief in the power of the arts to help students learn and thrive individually and academically. Her choice of casual and comfortable shoes hinted at a person who walks a great deal, setting my expectation for observing a hands-on and engaged teacher. Ms. Carter's student aides, as well as other students working on projects during their off-period, came in and out of the office as we talked. She introduced me to all of them, sharing their names, which class or classes they have with her, and how long she has known them. After they left, she shared a little bit of personal

information on each of them. We talked for a while and set up a specific time to conduct the formal interview because Ms. Carter had too much to finish today during her planning. As Department Chair, Art Club sponsor, Art Letter sponsor, and the leader for the art trip to France, as well as a mother and wife, Ms. Carter found herself busy at all times.

Ms. Carter gave me a tour of her room, including the main workspace and kiln room. Two things struck me immediately: 1) student marks pervade the space, whether in the form of senior portraits since 2003 hanging in a dedicated section of the wall; ceiling tiles, stool seats, and cinder blocks painted by outgoing seniors; or works made by past and present students and given to, or shared for the time being with Ms. Carter. Tall, narrow rectangular tables lined up in rows such that they formed a square outlining and pointing into the center of the room. Five electric wheels at against the wall to the office, with a deep, long stainless steel sink to their right. Above the sink, Ms. Carter had hung posters on the elements of art and design, as well as rules for cleaning the wheels and other classroom systems. Tall cabinets with doors sat on the wall opposite the wheels, with all of the tables and narrow aisles interposed between them. Posters displaying ceramic tea pots made by students for a college show, as well as other unique ceramic pieces, hung on the fronts of some of the cabinets. Lists of clean-up duties, aprons, and painters' overalls (for throwing on the wheel) rested below the senior pictures on the wall perpendicular to the cabinets. The glazing station, filled with samples, glazing books, and instructions, was positioned next to aprons along the same wall. The kiln room shared a wall with the office and overflowed with green ware, bisque fired pieces, and final glazed



pieces ready to go in the kiln. A machine for plugging (recycling) used class found a home in the kiln room as well. Color infused almost every inch of the space, mostly in the form of student work; a sense of belonging, ownership, and legacy emanated as a result.

**Belonging, ownership, and legacy.**

***Belonging.***

Belonging was evidenced in the way classroom life unfolded as well. Ms. Carter had relatively large classes, with between 25 and 30 students per class. I observed two Ceramics 2 classes, Ceramics 1, and Ceramics 3/4 (which also had the AP Ceramics students who no longer came to class after submitting their examinations).<sup>19</sup> In spite of the large size, Ms. Carter knew each student's name, as well as personal stories, and the students knew a great deal about each other. Students told me that she has them play name games at the beginning of each semester for her to get to know the students and them each other; as one student said, "It's like you always come here and you always know, 'Oh, we're gonna play those silly games.' And they are kind of silly, but then you really get to know people and they're so fun." She also used quick draw warm-ups to get to know the students by giving them personal prompts, such as drawing how they perceived "Random Acts of Kindness" or "The Perfect Date." During the classes, I observed students referring to each other by name, even when addressing people not in their immediate work group (based on where students chose to sit). Students intermingled with ease, feeling comfortable to ask for help mixing a glaze, rolling a slab, using a tool,

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<sup>19</sup> Ms. Carter taught one other Ceramics 1 class I was not able to observe since I had to pick up my son from school at that time.

or getting a piece out of the cabinet. In addition to talking about the work at hand, students chatted about prom, friends outside of class, sports, and more. Ms. Carter consciously crafted an environment that helped students feel like they belonged, that they mattered. In reviewing teacher evaluations she has the students complete, the impact of her emphasis on caring for and embracing the students becomes clearer:

MS: Mrs. Carter has always been one of my favorite teachers; she is always so nice to everyone. She always has a smile on her face. If you ask a question she is always there with the answer no matter what. I wish Mrs. Carter could teach all my other classes.

MS: She helps any student with anything and she is real to you. If she needs you to do something she makes sure you do it. She also talks with us not only as students but friends.

FS: A really great teacher and knows the subject. Makes everyone welcome.

FS: This class is fun and I enjoy going to it...unlike some other classes. Mrs. Carter makes it fun.

Her kindness and warmth made a difference for these students; they have fun and feel a sense of belonging.

Ms. Carter's choice to have music each day further enabled these feelings. One day a week she chooses the music, another day she has world music, and the other three days, the students get to choose.<sup>20</sup> One day during the Ceramics 3/4 class, the students sang out loudly and with passion to the country song, "Mr. Mom." Ms. Carter said to one of her male students, "I haven't heard Rob sing this loud in a long time. You like this song!" which made Rob smile. I observed students singing collectively and individually in other classes as well, which seemed to rejuvenate and energize them. The freedom to

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<sup>20</sup> Ms. Carter told me that part of the reason she has world music day is to attend to the lack of diversity they have at the school. She feels that student interactions with other cultures are lacking, and that supplementing her cultural diversity assignments with music is a powerful way to understand and think about other people.

choose with whom they sat further invigorated them and their work. Students could talk about mundane events, as well as heavy personal issues, and they always had someone to whom they could turn to ask for a creative opinion or help applying a particular technique.

As with Mr. Cole, problems would arise; students would engage in behavior contrary to her goals and Ms. Carter would respond immediately, modeling how to effectively manage difficulties in a respectful manner that helps retain trust. As a rule, Ms. Carter does not tolerate “potty” talk; each time a student swears or says something hurtful, he or she has to put a quarter into a jar or bring in cookies for class the next day (to keep everything “sweet”). Students monitor each other’s behavior in a fun-spirited way and overall this strategy keeps people kind. I recorded one time when a young man started the sounds of a swear word, inhaled and held his breath, and then blurted out the word, “Cookie!” Another time I observed a young man who was having a bad day overall, and it carried into ceramics class.

Jim: God damn! I poked myself twice! (Ms. Carter hears his potty talk)

Seth: Uh oh! She’s writing your name down.

(Jim stands for a little and then returns to the use the tool, but he continues to struggle. Seth walks over to him in a few minutes and tries to joke with him about his piece.)

Seth: Jim, that sucks.

Jim: Shut the f--- up.

Ms. Carter: Jim, come over and see me. (She quietly talks with him, listens to what is bothering him, and asks him to watch his language and stay five feet away from Seth until he calms down.)

Ms. Carter confirmed him as a person by not embarrassing or demeaning him in front of his peers, and worked relationally to diffuse the situation. Acting out did not make him a bad person; at the same time she dealt with the situation in order to help everyone feel

physically and emotionally safe.

Most of the students valued the rules and worked hard to treat Ms. Carter with the same respect she showed them. Very rarely, only on three occasions during my visit, in fact, did I observe students engage in sneaky behaviors that violated Ms. Carter's trust. Most of the time students were open with Ms. Carter about using their cell phones and respected her desire to follow school rules. However, two times I observed students sneaking to use their cell phones, either in the kiln room or under the table. A more egregious violation of trust occurred when two students snuck out of the kiln room (to purchase Pop-tarts) while Ms. Carter was helping other students. I only saw them as they returned, at which point two other students decided to sneak out and do the same. I let Ms. Carter know at an opportune moment, and she definitely felt violated.<sup>21</sup> Teachers can only take students so far; at some point they have to contribute to the relationship and make choices to give the same care they receive. Despite these anomalies, most of Ms. Carter's students appreciated the mutually respectful relationships she facilitated and assumed their role of carer as well.

***Belonging through culture.***

Ms. Carter told me that she believed she had to consciously incorporate culture to help culturally diverse students in particular, and all of her students in general, learn about each other and feel safe to draw upon who they truly are in their artwork. The lack of diversity at the school also played a factor in her decision. Having a world music day each week, where she or students brought in music from other parts of the world, served

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<sup>21</sup> Class had ended by the time we talked. Beginning student interviews the next day occupied my mind and I forgot to check on the outcome with Ms. Carter.

as one mechanism for her to expand student horizons. On one of the world music days I observed, a student had brought in the soundtrack from the movie “Slumdog Millionaire” and virtually everyone danced as they worked. Students could also choose to explore culture and issues around culture in any of the assignments, because Ms. Carter kept them open ended. For example, when having students make found-objects cigar-box sculptures on love, several students drew upon their cultural heritage to develop their concepts. On other occasions, Ms. Carter assigned students projects that asked them directly to research and incorporate their heritage.

One such assignment I saw had students integrate their culture in “Heritage Boxes.” Students had to interview someone in their family about their cultural heritage and reflect what they learned aesthetically when making a box using the slab method and etching or building up of images. Once completed, the students would share their boxes and stories in small groups. Although they took the artistic component seriously, few students prepared their stories for the small groups. Ms. Carter expressed that it made her sad, but the overall effect still achieved her aim of students learning about their own and each other’s heritage. One small group I observed shared stories about a Nebraskan grandfather’s passion for cows, how two parents met at college on a class field trip, and the importance of camping for another family. Some students also learned things about their families they had never known. One student made a box for her deceased Grandma with whom she had always baked Italian cookies, a family tradition. When Ms. Carter probed a little more, the student shared that through the interview for this project, she had learned her family was not only Italian, but also Apache; her grandfather had changed the

family name to his Italian wife's surname because he was embarrassed to be American Indian. Ms. Carter said, "This is kind of sad," and asked if the student had the recipe for the cookies. The young woman shared that she did not, and Ms. Carter encouraged her to ask for the recipe so she could continue the tradition.

Two students identified themselves as Irish-American. One of them said his family was of 90% Irish descent from the ruling house of Ireland, based on a genealogy one of his relatives completed. The other student told a touching story about her grandma and grandpa, on her mom's side, who met on the boat over from Ireland. They moved to Boston where her grandpa found that, "Nobody wanted to hire the Irish." As a result, he started his own business, a bar called "The Irish Club," which still stands to this day. Making a heritage box that reflected this story connected her even more strongly with her past and enhanced her feelings of pride. In addition to learning more about their backgrounds, students had the opportunity to draw upon this information to enhance their conceptual thinking and creativity.

### ***Ownership.***

In addition to this sense of community and belonging, Ms. Carter's trust in students to care for their surroundings engendered a sense of ownership. Students knew that Ms. Carter welcomed them to make the ceramics room their own, whether during off periods, before and after school, or over the summer. I saw two students in particular take advantage of being ahead in their other classes to come in and catch up on their work. One time, Jesse came in from English to get help on finishing his ceramics assignments. Ms. Carter helped him work on his box. At the same time, Harley came in to make a

birthday present for her friend. As they worked, Harley said that ceramics “releases my anger. I had a migraine one day and didn’t want to work, but working got rid of it. I love it.” Jesse relished that, “You can build what you want to build and take it home and use it” (e.g., a cereal bowl he made). Jesse came in several days to catch up. Another time, several students worked in the room during Ms. Carter’s planning period, some who had obtained passes from their teachers to come down. The following dialogue transpired:

Ms. Carter: I don’t want it to look like my class is more important than theirs.

FS1: Well it is.

FS2: My neighbor has you next year for Ceramics 1. I told her to be afraid.

Ms. Carter: Thanks!

The freedom to banter with Ms. Carter, tell her how they feel, and joke with her made the space their own.

Students took their ownership seriously, diligently cleaning, even after using the wheel, which involved at least 10 minutes to wash all of the pieces. When they made a mess, such as a large overflow of glaze (which I even helped clean up), dropping water on the floor, or cleaning for their final exams, most of the students exhibited a genuine appreciation for the space and materials and took their responsibility to maintain it seriously. Some students needed the external reward of extra credit, which Ms. Carter was happy to oblige. (e.g., one student asked, “Do we get extra credit? Can’t do it for nothing!”) Other students felt happy with a job well done, especially if they did it with their peers, such as one female student who said, “I think we’re done! Teamwork!” after she and her friends finished organizing the kiln room.

Expanding the amount of time students spend in the art room further engendered a sense of ownership. Ms. Carter had an 8 ½” x 11” sign-up list of students interested in

working over the summer; this list overflowed with names and email addresses and had another makeshift sheet attached to it by students wanting to add their names. At one point, I observed two students working feverishly to finish their Heritage Boxes; suddenly one of the students overhears others talking about the list, and she says to her friend, “Sign me up for studio time this summer; she’ll email you.” They talk about it for a minute and then both get up to write their names and email addresses on the list. Ms. Carter goes above and beyond her assigned duties to bring art into her students’ lives by working beyond the structural confines of the school.

This connection and ownership swelled beyond the bounds of the physical environment as well. For a few years, Ms. Carter has taken a group of students to a city in Europe to learn about and observe famous past and present artists and their work. The previous year she took the group to Italy and was leaving in a few weeks with a group to France. Students who currently took ceramics or had Ms. Carter previously filtered in and out of the office dropping off paperwork and asking questions about the trip. Ms. Carter shared that she loved the opportunity to bond with these students who seemed to be even more connected to their own art production in her room after the trips. She also set up opportunities for students to make art within the community, such as completing a community art project for a new neighborhood in their area or participating in an open microphone/visual arts night at a local café. Students did not just have a sense of ownership of the ceramics room; they possessed control over artistic expression and appreciation in a wide variety of contexts.



### ***Legacy.***

Ms. Carter employed other strategies that redefined traditional boundaries of time. By allowing seniors to decorate elements in the classroom, as well as post their pictures among previous graduating classes, Ms. Carter created a legacy and deepened sense of ownership. Current juniors and sophomores stated that they could not wait to paint their own stools and post their senior portraits. Even more powerfully, several times during my observations, former students came back to work in the art room. Ms. Carter knew how difficult it was to find a place to throw on a wheel or fire their work, and opened the ceramics room to former students as a result. Current students frequently marveled at and learned from the skill of these graduates. On one occasion a former student took the time to teach someone struggling next to her on the wheel. Ms. Carter's caring actions and commitment to helping students have art in their lives influenced her choices and created a trickle-down effect between different classes of students. She significantly expanded the meaning of continuity in relationships. Sometimes returning students showed Ms. Carter she succeeded in fashioning relationships and making a difference when she thought she'd failed, as shown in the following story she told:

My favorite ones are all of the hard ones, who take a long time, and then all of a sudden. I had one girl who I had my first year of teaching; [she] struggled, struggled, struggled with not being very nice, to put it nicely. And she came back and visited me two years later, and she was like, "I just wanted to say I'm sorry for being such a..." She used a bad word, but you know.

The student went out of her way to come back and apologize; Ms. Carter had confirmed her, stuck with her patiently, and when the student felt ready, she accepted how Ms. Carter cared.

**Creativity: Unique awareness of self.**

The same specific attention to creating a caring community enabled Ms. Carter to help students develop confidence in their creative abilities. She believed that by first establishing trust and a feeling of safety, students would feel confident to take risks. Sometimes creativity would occur serendipitously, but more often it resulted from specific steps Ms. Carter took and had her students take with each other.

***Nurturing creativity: teacher-to-student.***

Ms. Carter always kept the goal of conceptual and physical creativity front and center, whether designing and introducing lessons, conducting ongoing assessments of student work, or working with students on final evaluations. Ms. Carter fashioned detailed descriptions and expectations for student work, including accompanying rubrics and grade sheets that assessed if students could explain why they did something and how their finished work reflects their ideas. Each rubric built on prior lessons that focused on skills and tools, elements and principles of art, and how the students pushed themselves a little further. She engaged community in a safe way to help students learn from each other as well. For example, Ms. Carter had students do a “Silent Critique” using note cards, each with one of the following categories; students would select the piece that best represented each statement for them and leave the card, with comments, by that piece:

1. Elements and principles of art - This piece projects the elements and principles of art throughout their piece the very best (What and how?)
2. Excellent craftsmanship - This piece is beautiful; it displays a high level of skill (How?)
3. Conceptual - This piece visually has a clear and powerful concept. I learned the most about this person through their piece of art. (What is the concept and how is it evident to you?)
4. Where’s the love? - This piece needs a bit more love; it could use

improvements (Why and how?)

5. Emotional - This piece evokes a very strong emotion (What emotion and how?)

6. Mine - I would purchase this piece (Why?)

The categories helped students focus on formal principles, craftsmanship, and concept, all important aspects of the creative process. This critique method also helped them refine their connoisseurship and appreciation for art. I observed students using the silent critique one class period; the conversations reflected complex awareness and understanding of the creative process and seemed to make them feel as though their opinions mattered.

Ms. Carter also constantly worked one-on-one with students to push their thinking. In one instance, a student was making a saguaro cactus that represented the importance of family to her, because she grew up in Arizona. Ms. Carter pushed her thinking a little further:

Ms. Carter: Do you know why you're going to use the color red?

FS: Well...I don't know.

Ms. Carter: You need to know. You have to have a reason for everything you do.

For final evaluations Ms. Carter would sometimes have students write artist statements.

One student wrote about the importance of Reggae music in his life, in particular the song "Stir it up" by Bob Marley. He wrote that the bowl he made reflected life and all of his experiences; the spoon, with pictures of Bob Marley, reflected his friends and family, and how he relied upon the "spoon" to stir up his life and make it meaningful. Students who had Ms. Carter for more than one semester (or more than one year) conceptualized with greater ease. Hannah, an AP student, brought in a sculpture she'd made. She told me that she built an abstract smoke stack to symbolize pollution next to dwindling flowers struggling to grow in order to represent the tension between death/destruction and beauty/nature. Hannah said the only other class in which she could explore topics this

profoundly and creatively was English. She also told me that her mother felt so proud of her artwork and creativity and often inspired her; an especially important and poignant fact given that her father died when she was 11 and her mother was all she had.

Ms. Carter even assessed for her impact on student creativity in her evaluations. One parent wrote that, “She inspires creativity and confidence in kids.” A female student wrote that, “She has truly helped me to think about what I want to say.” A male student expressed that she, “inspires creativity. Very supportive of creativity. Overall a great teacher.” Yet another male student wrote that, “This class calms me down and gives me time to think about things. It opens my mind to crazy ideas that I enjoy.”

***Nurturing creativity: student-to-student.***

Through her modeling and direct instruction on how to think conceptually and strive to be creative, Ms. Carter empowered students to do the same. Being an artistic soul, passionate about art and how it influences her life, Ms. Carter used her creative work as a model. My introduction to this practice didn’t come from Ms. Carter but rather from an interaction between two students. Avery was absent one day when Ms. Carter shared some slides of her artwork and the stories behind them. She asked Wes to go over the slides with Avery.

Wes is explaining Ms. Carter’s work to Avery to give him a sense of what an artist’s statement is about.

Avery: Whoa! It’s so cool! (Re: teapot) That’s awesome! (Re: bag)

Wes: She made a mug for her grandfather in high school and didn’t know how to trim it, so it’s really heavy. She uses a tearing technique on her teapots. Her relationship with her first husband was abusive and her sculpture is about abusive relationships.

Avery: That’s so cool. I like that. (Re: tags at base of woman’s body)

Wes: That’s one of my favorites.

Ms. Carter felt safe to model how art can help heal and make sense of one's life, whether dealing with traumatic events or everyday experiences. Wes and Avery were genuinely inspired by her ideas *and* techniques. Her willingness to share trickled down from one student to another and in turn strengthened their desire to create.

Students echoed and expanded upon other lessons Ms. Carter taught them. When one student felt frustrated and bemoaned a "mistake" she'd made, another male colleague quickly chimed in, "There are no mistakes in art." I frequently saw students helping each other building pieces, glazing, or even throwing on the wheel. They had something to teach and their classmates happily worked with them.

(Kira helping two students at the wheel, Melissa and Christine.)

Melissa: I'm scared.

Kira: Don't go as fast when you open it up, but don't go too slow... You don't have to worry about freaking out at first.

(Kira works with Melissa and Christine for about 15 minutes, patiently guiding them with her words and sometimes her hands over theirs. After a while they start to feel more confident and are ecstatic when they actually craft reasonably well-constructed mugs.)

They kept going, trusting Kira to see them through. This type of resilience came out continually during the classes I observed. Sometimes students would get so frustrated they would literally "roar;" ultimately a neighbor calmed them down and helped them find a solution to their problem, or they would keep experimenting until they found one of their own. In one instance I admired a student's "box of crayons" which represented specific events and people in her life. She shared that she didn't necessarily feel good at art and that she didn't like her box. She quickly added, "But that doesn't stop me. I just wish it looked better."

### ***The creative process.***

More so than in the photography and studio art classes I observed, ceramics brought out a deeply physical connection with the medium that influenced the creative process. Sometimes clay evoked students' intuitive imaginations, such as when a female student told her classmate that, "The wheel; sometimes you know in advance what you want, sometimes you just practice with the clay and see what happens." Other times, the physical realities of the medium occupied their minds and bodies:

They press wet cones of clay onto the wheel and bend forward. The pressure of their hands begins to shape the clay; a rhythmic beat pulses in the background. Wet clay coats their forearms, hands, and fingers. "My hands are tired." Press, wet, press; panting, out of breath. Over and over they clean excess clay off the wheel with a sponge. One of the young women says, "My arms are killing me." The other student adds "My legs are sweaty." They continue to work, willing the clay to take shape with every fiber of their being. "Oh my god. This makes me so tired." She gives a huge sigh, almost more of a heaving breath. "My arms or so tired."

Her head bends close, closer. She makes delicate stroke after delicate stroke to fashion fine black swirls on rough-textured, fired clay. Five, ten, twenty minutes pass by; swirl, after swirl, after swirl dance around her piece. She says to her friend, "I don't want to do this anymore." Her friend replies "Go on! You're almost done. Keep going" and patiently watches and supports each swirl.

Students continually experimented with shaping, sanding, glazing, molding, and building with this versatile and fragile medium, more than once suffering the disappointment of cracks and breaks, and sometimes total destruction in the kiln. Yet they kept going, learning the essential give and take of clay and the effect of their manipulations and effort. One young man aptly expressed this relationship as follows:

Well, the clay has a mind of its own. So there are days where people will see me just yelling at the clay until it works. But the practice really helps, I've found. I've seen other people work and really start to get frustrated when something breaks or stops working, and I can't really bash them because, it's happened to me. It's really annoying, but that's the nature of the clay.

Ultimately, the combination of experimenting with the constraints and freedom of the clay and Ms. Carter's push for conceptual creativity, students ended up with distinctive pieces reflective of their sense of self. I list several descriptions of student pieces here to provide a sense of the breadth of their work as reflective of their unique experiences and personalities:

Jared makes a face for his fetish box. He has a big screw sticking out of half the face to represent how a car accident he was in impacts his life.

Jared: "Some of my crazy side is shown by the nails out of the head. My sad side is my mouth."

He wants to hang icons off the large screw that depict bad things such as a car.

Jared also has part of his head open with a flower to show "how mind blowing I am; how creative." His choice of colors reflects how he sees himself as energetic and hopeful for a full recovery.

A female student carves a jagged line across her heart box. Her fetish box is to remind her of her friend who died in a car accident. She says that the line reflects the "tear in my heart [that] will always ache, but it is a part of me now."

Hillary made a Skippy peanut butter jar. It "reflects the love that my mom has for me because she makes me PBJ everyday."

Cathy makes dozens of tiny pebbles that fill the base of a large box, like a mailbox. "It's really a waterfall. My friend fell down a waterfall and was injured last year." She has put in protective icons, the pebbles, with positive statements on each.

Violet says that her vase is only allowed to hold daisies and lilacs. Her grandmother, who has died, loved lilacs, and her first dog, that died, was named Daisy. She has circles, hanging icons, to show the current of life, how it flows, "what I learned on my way up." She is slipping and scoring pieces she threw to fashion the vase.

A young woman did very detailed needling on the top of her heritage box; it took her 3 days. She tells me that the box shows her heritage; she's from Bangladesh and it's a henna pattern. Her family moved to America 18 years ago, where they lived in New York for four years before moving to Colorado and she wants to stay connected to her culture.

Melanie has a crazy, fun, hectic life with her family; “*kiakaha*” is written on her box which means forever strong in Hawaiian. She has music notes to represent dance.

Jim is working on a Raiders box; he is making it in memory of a friend who committed suicide and loved the Raiders.

In addition to showing the interrelationship between the medium and conceptual thinking during the creative process, these vignettes reveal how the projects helped students integrate lived experiences. Each piece provided an opportunity for them to share their thoughts and feelings with others in a safe environment, a life skill that they can carry with them always.

**Student perceptions: The calm within the storm.**

As with Mr. Cole’s class, I selected four students to participate in a formal interview, part of which involved reviewing photos I had them take that represented how art influences their lives. Relationships, creativity, inspiration, happiness, and other subtleties of life appeared once again as dominant themes. They talked about how Ms. Carter shapes how they feel during art class, as well as outside of class in how she has taught them to look at the world. They also talked about the importance of friends and family members and the role of music in strengthening their creativity.

***The calm within the storm.***

As with Mr. Cole’s students, time spent in the art room meant a time to recharge and escape the stress of other classes. Perhaps the demographics of Palomino, and the pressure put on students by the faculty and their parents to attend competitive colleges, contributed to an even more heightened sense of needing to relax and get away. Even though all of the students talked about working hard in ceramics, putting in their all, the



way in which they felt supported and free to have greater control over their environment imbued in them a sense of calm and happiness.

This is one class I really look forward to coming to; the class period I have before this, I can get really frustrated or freaked out. Here, I can just come, everybody's kind of mellow, and I can just kind of come in and cool down. It makes the rest of my day better. ~Wes, Ceramics 2 student

Well all of the students are just like all friends. We all joke around, and it's really funny. I just love coming to class every day 'cause I just laugh and it just relaxes me, and it's so calming. It takes away the stress for the rest of the day. She makes it fun. Like most classes are really boring and you just sit there and keep asking, "Is class over yet?" But in here it's like, "Dang it! It's over!" When we've got to start cleaning up, I try and work until like the very last second. That's why I like having art before lunch 'cause then I can work sometimes into lunch. ~Anna, Ceramics 3/4 student and Student Aide

I would definitely say, very happy, nice 'cause it's not stressful. It's, I don't know. It's just really, it's a lot nicer than most other classes 'cause you don't have to worry about all this paperwork and stuff, and everybody is really in a good mood. [They don't complain like in other classes where] usually, everybody's like, "Oh, I didn't do well on a test or something." And they're like, "This teacher did something." I don't know, here it's just really nice. ~Matthew, Ceramics 2 student

When you're here it's different because we're not just all sitting at desks. We get up and move around, and we look at each other's stuff, and we critique each other's artwork. Other classes we just sit there and take notes. Here I see what other people are doing and I'm like, "Oh, I can do this; I could like make it like this, and change it up a little bit." And I like helping other people, giving them ideas and stuff. ~Anna, Ceramics 3/4 student and Student Aide

When you're in here, some days you want to talk while you're working, and some days you come in and you have to work; you're totally focused and you don't talk the whole period. You really can focus in here, even though we listen to music and people are talking and stuff; you can totally focus. It's just a calming environment. I don't know; it's just a good class. I feel like you learn so much. Like Ms. Carter, when she's talking to us, she'll use vocab. terms or something that we need to know and helps us understand. ~Kira, Ceramics 2 student

***Ms. Carter.***

When thinking about and critiquing Ms. Carter's teaching, students repeatedly emphasized her humor, dedication to ensuring student success, passion for art, and creativity. Her relaxed manner invited them to immerse themselves in art production individually and with each other; her ability to teach them essential skills gave them the confidence to take risks and reach her high standards. They felt respected, confirmed, and important as a result of who she is and how she teaches.

Ms. Carter, she's really nice. She'll work with the students if they need help. She's very understanding if we just talk to her. She's very easy to get along with. She's helpful. She has good insight on some things that you might not think about when you're doing your piece. She might come over and say, "That's cool. Maybe you could try something like this." Or just some ideas you might not have thought about before. ~Matthew, Ceramics 2 student

She's not like most of the teachers who sit there and tell you what to do. She interacts with you and tries to help you. She'll come up and talk to you about your work, your life, and how it's going and everything. She's really cool. She's a calm teacher. She's really relaxed and a really nice teacher and not like, "Do your work. Do your work." She's not like, "Do this or you're going to fail." And she just helps you and doesn't go sit at her computer and do emails or something. Also, she's so funny. She always jokes around with us. If someone said something, like a funny story, she'll laugh at them. She's just really funny. Not like most teachers. ~Anna, Ceramics 3/4 student and Student Aide

She's so creative. Sometimes you'll look at pieces and you'll be like, "I wonder who made that." And she'll be like, "Oh, I made that." And you're like, "Really?" You don't know it can come from her. And then sometimes she'll look at your pieces, and she'll be like, "Why don't you add this." And you're like, "Oh yeah. Why didn't I think of that?" She just helps make everything better. ~Kira, Ceramics 2 student

It's set up so that you can be with your friends. Most other classes, there's a seating chart or something, or classes are in rows, so you kind of have to focus on the floor or something; but, with how it's set up, you can do what you like, kind of your own comfort zone, and you can kind of go anywhere in the room and just like, I don't know, you can work off the energy. ~Matthew, Ceramics 2 student



That picture I took of Ms. Carter because she has had a huge impact on my creativity. Also, she is one of the main reasons I want to go into teaching. I have a few other teachers, but she's a big part. Just the way she treats everybody and how she'll listen to you. If you have a question, if she doesn't know the answer, she'll try to figure it out for you. If you're working on something and you don't have the right tool for it, she'll go, "Hey, look in this drawer in my desk," and it's there. ~Wes, Ceramics 2 student

*Figure 7. Ms. Carter is an inspiration (Wes)*

I would definitely say that she's a good teacher. You can tell that she's definitely an artist so she can understand what you're doing; that you don't need her constantly looking over and telling you everything to do. She'll give you little pointers here and there. Just how she teaches helps build you as an artist. I remember seeing one of her pieces, I think it was halfway through the semester; but she brought it in and it was something that she had done on the wheel. She had worked it a little bit, on purpose, to make it look like a pregnant woman. I just thought that was really interesting; I thought it was very unique and it was a cool idea. ~Matthew, Ceramics 2 student

She gets us to work, but she's like really nice about it, and she helps us learn more. For example, this one kid had a "D" and he was like, "I really need to get it up or something," and she was like, "Well, if you talk to me about your art, then I can help you move it." So she motivates us to do better. She always makes sure she's there for us. She's our teacher but kind of seems like our friend. And she's funny because if someone does something she's like, "I can't believe you just did that." Or something, you know, stuff that she's not used to and she still gets like embarrassed and stuff. It's just funny. ~Kira, Ceramics 2 student

Well I see her as a teacher who's really dedicated to her subject. She wants you to succeed, and she's willing to try anything to help you do that. And she's really helped me do that. She's recommended things for me to do. I got to go to the middle school earlier this semester to talk to eighth graders about taking art classes here, and I think she's a great person who's dedicated in her work, which I think makes a great teacher. ~Wes, Ceramics 2 student

I love the way that she teaches because she tells us, "Hey, live for today." She makes sure we know what we're doing. She'll give an example of it and show us how to do it. Each project, she's like, "Ok, everyone gather around." We don't have to take notes or anything, we just watch. She always makes sure we're all

around watching. And even if you don't get it, she'll come over to you individually and help you if you need it. She's always around the classroom. So you're like, "Ms. Carter?" And she's like, "Hold on." But I love the way she teaches 'cause it's not like any other classroom at all. ~Kira, Ceramics 2 student

### ***Inspiration and motivation.***

Whether drawing upon the colors, images, and vibrant decorations of the classroom, the energy and insight of their colleagues, or the admiration and support of family and friends, the students were informed by the world around them. Their art production and creative processes changed how they responded to their surroundings, as did watching their colleagues engage with their own work. It also helped them build stronger relationships with their peers, friends, and family. Everything and everyone became a source of inspiration and motivation.

I come in after school to work on my projects. One of my friends who plays lacrosse, and that's how I know him, he's an AP Ceramics student, and whenever I came in, at least towards the end of the semester, he was there. Another girl that was in my Physics class was in here. So I just know some of the people from ceramics. It's easy; it was kind of cool to be able to talk with them. ~Matthew, Ceramics 2 student



I like looking at them all. I look at the ceiling all the time, and I've probably like read all the things on the wall so many times. I just think they're so cool. And then how she lets students paint on the chairs and stuff. I like that. You know, I just think it's really cool. ~Kira, Ceramics 2 student

*Figure 8 Stools painted by Ms. Carter's graduating seniors (Juli)*



The globe; the reason I took a picture of that was because I feel that artwork is alive, and I really want to travel the world and see what other cultures are like, what they do with their artwork. And I just really, I just thought that the globe looked cool with the ribbon on it.  
~Wes, Ceramics 2 student

*Figure 9. Learning about the world (Wes)*

Most of them seem really interested in it. They try new things, and then when it works out and then if it doesn't, they try and tweak it to figure it out. Others, it's just kind of like an easy class for them, but most of them want to expand their knowledge of it and try new things. ~Anna, Ceramics 3/4 student and Student Aide



Those are salt and pepper shakers. My grandma, she loved them, and she's like, "Those are so cute. I want some so bad." I let her have them so she could take them home. ~Kira, Ceramics 2 student

*Figure 10. Salt & Pepper shakers given to grandmother (Kira)*



[I had this piece] in my room, and then my mom took it. I didn't know where it was for two months, and then it was one of my Christmas presents. She went and had it framed. She loves it; it's hanging up in our hallway when you first walk in and then you go up the stairs; it's right there. They put up your pictures on the fridge when you're like five, but then for her to go out and have it framed, that's really good. ~Anna, Ceramics 3/4 student and Student Aide

*Figure 11. Framed ceramic tile piece (Anna)*



This is my second bass; I only have two. The reason I did this one color is because that's my favorite color. It's like a sea-foam green or blue. And, also it kind of fit the fact that the music I play on it is loud, it's fun, and it also goes along with the music being a big part of my creativity.  
~Wes, Ceramic 2 student

*Figure 12. Music influences visual arts creativity (Wes)*



I looked at the wall, a wall off the highway. I liked how it was cracked, but it was still together, 'cause it's breaking, but it sticks. A lot of my stuff is cracked in half and I'm trying to fix it, and then it won't fix, so I'll just be like, "Oh that looks good with a crack in it." ~Anna, Ceramics 3/4 student and Student Aide

*Figure 13. The aesthetic beauty of cracks (Anna)*



That's my mug, and I always leave it there every morning because, my dad, I'm like, "Drink out of my coffee cup." And he takes a "to-go" mug, but I always leave it there. And my sister was like, "I'll take a picture of you using it." And I was like, "Okay." ~Kira, Ceramics 2 student

*Figure 14. Kira and her mug (Kira's sister)*

**Ms. Scott**

Hearing about Ms. Scott at a 4<sup>th</sup> of July town picnic seemed only natural given the small size of the mountain community where she lives and works. When I first met her and told her the story of how I heard about her, her eyes widened in surprise and then sparkled at the compliments I shared. In fact, her entire face sparkled; a kind, expressive face that queried, exclaimed, and pondered of its own accord. Soft, wavy, light-brown hair, sometimes drawn back in sparkly barrettes, crowned and framed her face. She dressed herself in typical mountain clothing: soft cottons, easy to layer, earthy tones, and shoes crafted for comfort and durability. Ms. Scott wrote on her questionnaire that, “Caring means giving of oneself or time in order to meet the needs of another individual.” Here she was, willing to give of her self and time to meet my needs. Through our early communication, in person, via email, and on the phone, I knew that I would have to make her participation as effortless as possible because of how harried and stretched she said she was. I took this charge seriously and worked hard to be supportive and confirming of her efforts.

**Peak High School**

Far west of Denver, wide open valleys and mountain peaks, with a mix of ranches and residential life, surround Peak High School. Unlike Palomino, most of the development is rural in nature, with students sometimes having to travel thirty minutes to reach the school. Most of the freshmen through senior students live in three small towns located within twenty miles of the school; the remainder of students lives on farms or ranches in the area. A vast gap exists between the wealthiest and poorest; the wealthier

students live in large homes in the town closest to a local ski resort, and the poorer students live in apartments or on agricultural property. Many of the students are first generation Americans immigrating primarily from Mexico or countries in the former Soviet Union, such as Latvia, Ukraine, and Lithuania. Ms. Scott is the sole visual arts teacher due to the small size of the school, but the school does have a strong industrial and technical arts program. Peak is the smallest Colorado school in the study with 441 students. Eighty-nine percent of the students are White, 10% Hispanic, .02% Asian, .01% American Indian, and .002% African American. Just over 2% of the students have a language other than English spoken in their home, and 12.1% qualify for free and reduced lunch. The school's academic ratings mirror Palomino, earning a "high" for Overall Academic Assessment and "low" Growth for student improvement.

**Intentions: Making connections.**

Ms. Scott states clearly and emphatically that she wants students to work conceptually as artists. She believes that by linking art production to their own ideas and experiences they will learn more about themselves and find a passion for art:

I try to design my projects so that it will be exciting for them, and also so that there's freedom for them to say something about what they believe, who they are within their work. There's intentionality behind what they're doing. I always encourage them to think about that. In the pre-planning stages, "What is this about? What do you want to show? How are you going to show it?" I think that's pretty important in how I put stuff together.

Developing and fleshing out ideas serves a significant function which takes on greater importance and meaning as students actually make art. For Ms. Scott, these two components of the creative process, conceptualizing and making, flow seamlessly in the



ideal situation. Helping her students to think creatively means nothing without ensuring they put their ideas into a concrete form:

I think all human beings have creativity, but I think the application of it is what kind of makes it a valid thing. So the chance to take our ideas and make them into something physical that we can touch or see or respond to, I think is creativity...And it's difficult because you can have someone who is very creative and they have a lot of creativity, but until they're actually doing something with it, it's not serving them well, because they have this idea just simmering...It's still creativity, but it's hard to see if it's creativity until it has manifested in something.

Ms. Scott wants her students' work to manifest in something, to find expression in the tangible world. Accordingly, she sees her job as providing them with the conceptual and skill development pieces necessary to support their creative endeavors. Conceptually, Ms. Scott wants her students to look at the complexity of seemingly simple things, increasing their attention to detail in the physical and mental realms of their lives. As she states, "I hope that part of my program helps them get some confidence in themselves as an individual creative thinker, as an imaginer." In order to effect their ideas artistically, Ms. Scott states that:

If I see their idea of trying to communicate this and this, and I feel like they could use a couple of techniques to do that better, that's another goal, to help equip them with the skills to say what they want to say effectively.

By having students develop their thinking and means of art production, Ms. Scott also hopes to instill in them an appreciation for the role of artistic expression plays beyond the art classroom, for themselves and humanity in general. Making art is an integral part of the human experience for Ms. Scott, and she believes that students should be empowered to understand and be a part of this process:

I'm very aware that most of my students are not going to be amazing professional artists, or even go to art school, or even major in art, even the ones who love it. But I am aware that art can be an important part of who you are, and I want them

to enjoy something about that process. I want them to find something about themselves that they can relax with, that they can connect with, or that they can even see pieces in society and [have] different appreciation for the arts and the fact that they exist in humanity. I want to fill them with a sense of connection to my room and being here, and then something about themselves that they can connect with.

This last part about connecting with the room, with being in art, parallels sentiments expressed by all of the teachers. The teachers, Ms. Scott included, all believe that the environment they create is crucial for helping them achieve their goals. Ms. Scott wants her students to make a connection between space and creativity, enabling them to draw upon their environment to realize their potential:

The art room is a place for them to get ideas and for them to realize that their ideas can come into fruition. I think that skill alone is huge for the rest of their lives, because when they get an idea in the workplace, or when they get an idea with their family, or when they [can find] the tools to carry that out and believe that they can approach something, I think [that's] really important.

Perhaps more important than the physical space, however, are the emotional and relational qualities fashioned in that space. Ms. Scott believes that forming an environment congenial to creativity means helping them feel comfortable and cared for:

I think a caring atmosphere can encourage them to take more risks and therefore they're involved more in the process. Definitely the creativity will be increased. If you feel comfortable in a space, which comfort is related to caring, if you feel positive within a space, I think that you will be a lot less inhibited to create.

Ms. Scott holds that the responsibility to initially fashion this environment rests with her, but ultimately she must instill a sense of responsibility for the community in her students. She believes that helping them develop positive relationships with each other will lead to greater student creativity and confidence:

I think it's really important that they can connect with other people in the class so that they can be comfortable and grow in their work. A part of the team building activities comes with the notion that they often have to share their work with each

other through critiques or through different evaluations. And I want them to know each other and be comfortable enough with each other that they can be honest. Like, “I don’t like what you’re doing here. I think if you change it this way,” without being offensive to somebody. I think having a connection to another student [is important].

Ms. Scott hopes that knowing each other and working together as a team will boost student confidence and success, as well as how they communicate about art.

Beyond supporting the creative process, Ms. Scott deems it essential for students to just be happy and have fun. She worries that they get bogged down in a negative system that stifles their growth as complex human beings, and she works to counteract the effects of that system:

I want to make learning fun. I want them to enjoy school in some way, to do something different for these kids so that they’re not bored and frustrated and stressed with this system. Working in the system it’s hard to do that. It’s hard to encourage a like for that system while I’m in that system, but, that is one of my main goals for my students.

For Ms. Scott, happiness and fun have value regardless of any other outcomes, and she wants to enable her students to feel and celebrate this aspect of being human.

### **A positive space.**

Ms. Scott put her beliefs into action when setting up an art space designed to help students feel comfortable and inspired. The “space” actually begins in the commons area by the main office, where student murals cover several large sections of the walls and student self-portraits, sculptures, and other art invited people to stop and look at them in large, glass display cases. Down the technical arts hallway just off the commons, more student murals decorate the walls, all the way to the last door on the right; the door to Ms. Scott’s room.

Her class occupied the old auto-shop space, a large warehouse-like room, with a high ceiling (at least 15' high) and gray cement floors. A windowed office sat in one corner, a bathroom covered with murals and other artwork sat in another. Toward the side middle of the room there were film processing and dark rooms, separated by their own doors. Several shelves for ceramics projects filled up part of the back wall immediately adjacent to the kiln. This back section of the room felt a little overwhelming for its disarray, and in fact symbolized how Ms. Scott had to prioritize her time and energy.<sup>22</sup>

Art covers the customary, as well as odd and unusual spaces; such as hanging from the ceilings or jutting out from the walls. For example, a sculpture of a hand peeked out between a ceiling tile frame and the tile, a piece of brown paper towel pinched between its thumb and forefinger. Another hand, its thumb and forefinger delicately touching, stuck out from the wall. Explosions of color and images cover the ceiling, walls, stools, tables, and cabinets. Placards of construction paper covered with plastic wrap hang from the ceiling over each table: Picasso, Van Gogh, Dali, Warhol, Kandinsky, and Pollock are written on the various cards, and I later learned that these labels identified table groups to which Ms. Scott could refer when asking students to clean-up. The room also exudes powerful statements, strivings for expression, and a desire to leave a mark. One student had painted a mural entitled "A World Away" about the crisis of child soldiers in Uganda.<sup>23</sup> Another student had posted a hand-printed sign

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<sup>22</sup> Ms. Scott attends to aspects of the room that directly impact the students' ability to do their work. Students functioned fine without this area being more organized. Over the course of my visit, Ms. Scott did have her teacher assistants clean it one day, which seemed to make it much easier for students to navigate when working on their ceramics projects.

<sup>23</sup> The local newspaper actually photographed the mural and ran an article on the young woman and her efforts to raise funds to help the children in Uganda.

that read, “*When in Doubt* RUN to the ART ROOM!” (Typestyle reflects her choice of lettering). Other murals, as well as painted cinder blocks, signs, and artwork reveal that students have a connection to and sense of ownership of the space, indicating that Ms. Scott achieved her goal for creating a positive space.

**Building a team.**

***Personal connections.***

With ownership comes responsibility, or in the case of Ms. Scott’s art room ownership and responsibility continually informed and strengthened each other. Regardless of the order, Ms. Scott fostered both by building a team through which students learned the importance of their individual contributions for the greater good, and how the actions of others impact them. Ms. Scott acted as a coach, helping students practice and master the social skills necessary to build community. Each semester she would play games that enabled the students to learn each other’s names and realize that Ms. Scott meant for them to have a good time while in art. By the time I started my observations, near the end of the first semester, students had built close collegial relationships with people at their immediate tables and supportive working relations with others in the class. They shared supplies, food, drinks, and materials. They greeted each other warmly, often with hugs and excitement. Ms. Scott modeled the importance of warm greetings by standing at the door each period, welcoming all of the students by name and asking questions which suggest that she knows more about their lives than what transpires in the classroom. Sometimes the daily greetings were an opportunity to celebrate small victories:

Ms. Scott: RB I am so excited! You know what you have just shown me? That it's possible to be on time!

MS: Yeah, and I'm sweating.

(He makes it to class on time the next day, and Ms. Scott gives him a high-five.)

Other times they gave her an opportunity to welcome students back after a long absence:

(FS returns after a trip to Mexico; Ms. Scott gets excited and they give each other a quick hug.)

Ms. Scott: Was it nice to see people?

FS: Yeah it was.

Ms. Scott's genuine joy at seeing the students each day helped them feel that they mattered and sparked feelings of trust and mutual respect. Students emulated her actions and welcomed each other in similar ways and with the same enthusiasm whether for their friends or me, an outsider who'd joined their community for a short while:

2FS hug again.

FS1: I miss you.

FS2: I miss you. I can't believe you're going to be gone for one whole week.

FS1: You're lucky I'm here even one day.

MS: How are you? (To me)

Me: Good. How are you?

MS: I'm doing well. How was yesterday?

Me: Great. Today was even better.

Heartfelt greetings were just the beginning. Ms. Scott's desire to build a warm environment and sense of belonging motivated her to give each student, and herself, a day to bring in and play his or her choice of music. Not only did the music enliven the atmosphere, it helped the students learn more about each other, appreciate different genres of music, and feel inspired. Students played everything from Billie Holliday's "Pennies from Heaven" to rap, alternative, rock, new age, and country music. One time a student raced to turn up the volume on the song "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," at which point several students started singing loudly and dancing. Students truly valued the

music and would make sure they knew whose day it was, even if that meant taking control themselves:

FS: Whose music day is it? She didn't hear me...I'm going to go check.  
(Ms. Scott had a calendar list with names on the front bulletin board. She gets up and looks at the list.)  
FS: Ms. Scott, it's your day. Do something different, something funky.

The music provided opportunities for feeling connected, as well as controlling and creatively responding to their environment.

Feeling connected to the space and their art production drew the students to the art room. On the days Ms. Scott allowed students to work over her lunch and planning periods (their study halls) they filled the space. They were so excited on the days the art room was open during study hall:

FS: Are me and Megan allowed to come in?  
Ms. Scott: Yes, today you are (for Wednesday study hall)  
FS: Yeah!

Students also frequently arrived before school, came in on Fridays when Ms. Scott opened the art room,<sup>24</sup> and worked when they had off periods (the only restriction being that students wanting to use the photography equipment could not come in during the photography class because equipment was limited). Part of their comfort stemmed from the systems Ms. Scott implemented that gave students control of the space. Students knew where to find forms and descriptions of assignments; had specific drawers, shelves, or hooks to store their work; and were free to access supplies as needed, whether for class assignments or personal projects. Ms. Scott ultimately controlled student access to the

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<sup>24</sup> Due to budget constraints, classes were not held on Fridays. Both Ms. Scott and the students said they enjoyed the three day weekends, especially because large numbers of them went skiing or snowboarding. However, having longer days Monday through Thursday (7:30-4:30) took a toll.

room and sometimes she did have to set limits, but overall her aim of giving them a sense of ownership enhanced feelings of belonging and a team, communal environment.

In some instances, helping students feel part of the team required paying attention to language differences. Over the first two days of my observations I met a young man who had moved from Mexico only three weeks prior. He spoke little English, worked quietly, and painstakingly spoke with Ms. Scott and other students when he had questions. Ms. Scott and the other students tried to speak Spanish with him, but their fluency was not sufficient for him to speak as he normally would. He worked quietly most of the time. At one point, the native Spanish speaking student who had just returned from Mexico sat down at his table; when she began interacting with him I saw a completely different young man. From the moment she sat at his table, they talked and talked. She tucked him under her wing, helped him learn more about the systems in the art room, and served as someone off whom he could bounce his ideas. Their interactions and the transition in his demeanor and confidence emphasize the importance of language as a tool for connecting students to their learning and learning communities.

As in Mr. Cole's class, one of the native Spanish speakers asked me if I spoke Spanish. He had moved to Colorado from Chihuahua five years prior. He said that Ms. Scott would try to speak Spanish with him as best she can and that he liked being able to incorporate his culture into his artwork. I observed Ms. Scott on several occasions talking with students for whom Spanish was their first language to make sure they understood the readings and instructions. The students for whom Russian was their first language had generally lived in Colorado longer and felt more comfortable with English. I never heard



them speaking a language other than English during class and would not have known they were bilingual if not for my conversations with them.<sup>25</sup> Ms. Scott paid attention to language and cultural differences in order to make sure students felt safe, informed, and part of the community. She valued this sense of belonging in its own right but knew that without it students would fail to reach their creative and artistic potential.

As with all of the teachers, students who had taken other classes from Ms. Scott emulated warm and communal behaviors more readily. Students taking their first class tended to stick to people in their working group, although even they branched out to others on occasion. Ms. Scott spent more time inculcating them and had to take direct action once in a while to reinforce her expectations. One situation I observed involved younger students playing around in a way that interfered with their work and bothered others around them:

(Ms. Scott reminds them to have fun and laugh but keep it quiet or they can't work together. She talks with them quietly.)

Ms. Scott: I'm warning the three of you.

(She's already moved one of the boys to another table, but he sits nearby.)

Ms. Scott: Joey, you are not allowed to talk to this table. We tried it and it didn't work.

Joey: Can I cross conversate from my table?

Ms. Scott: No.

(The next she day moves all three to different tables a bit further apart. The effect is immediate and positive. They befriend students at their new tables but work diligently most of the period.)

Ms. Scott not only addressed behaviors that interfered with student work; she also immediately confronted students if they spoke negatively about or toward other people, whether in the class or not:

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<sup>25</sup> Researchers interested in the role of native languages in the classroom, visual arts classrooms in particular, and the experiences of students who have immigrated from other places, might find this topic of interest for their work.

Some students are talking negatively about another student not in the class. They say they're just talking about a debate from debate class when Ms. Scott confronts them gently (almost as if reminding them that they know better). Ms. Scott asks them not to bring it into this space.

Protecting the space and the team environment she valued guided her actions and in turn those of the students. In one instance when a student used the word "faggoty," Ms. Scott said, "Can you use a different word?" and a student commented on the inappropriateness of the word as well. Students knew that Ms. Scott held them to a higher standard and they tried to honor her wishes because it made them feel a sense of safety and belonging. As one student expressed it:

Ms. Smith is very funny. If she thinks that you're talking about somebody else, like in a not positive way, a negative way, or even if you're just talking about somebody else in general she'll come over and she'll be like, "We're not allowed to talk about other people that way in this class. If I hear it again, we might have to have a chitchat." So she totally cares about how we are and how we respect one another. If one table is being really, really loud, she'll make them split up for the sake of the classroom. She's like, "You guys aren't working well together. I'm doing this for you. I'm doing this for the rest of the class as well. You're gonna move here. You're gonna move over here."

At one point a student quipped, in a jovial manner, that Ms. Scott was "yelling" at her and "lowering her self-esteem" (Ms. Scott was asking her, in her usual kind manner, to finish a certain task). The students knew that Ms. Scott worked hard to neither yell nor hurt their self-esteem and felt safe as a result.

Just as students practiced caring behaviors by greeting each other warmly, I saw them practice other behaviors modeled by Ms. Scott. For instance, when Ms. Scott overheard a student talking about wanting to ditch Spanish, she immediately confronted him. He told her that he didn't want to go because all the teacher did was "blab" and that "blabbing is not teaching." Ms. Scott replied that, "You still have to go for the blabbing."

She didn't argue against his feelings, but rather expressed that she didn't want him to create extra problems and stress for himself. I observed almost an identical scenario between students, where one student worried about his classmate ditching:

Pedro: Sean, do you only come to school when you feel like it?

(Pedro's a very dedicated student who moved from Chihuahua five years ago)

Sean: I come to school; I just don't come to this class. I'm not an artist...Oh! I don't go to French either.

Pedro: You should come to class.

Pedro felt empowered to care for and confront Sean. Perhaps he would have done so in another class, but the physically conducive and emotionally safe space Ms. Scott built to support the team concept appeared to be a critical factor.<sup>26</sup>

***Helping students assume responsibility.***

In addition to making personal connections, helping students assume responsibility for their work and the physical surroundings was a critical aspect of building a team. Ms. Scott worked hard to ingrain in students how their actions affected others, especially in regards to care for materials. Unlike Mr. Cole and Ms. Carter's classes, these students seemed to struggle more in this area. Ms. Scott shared with me that building a sense of team and personal responsibility around cleaning had in fact proved terribly challenging. She had recently developed a competitive system whereby each class earned points for cleaning. If a later class found materials put away incorrectly, paints not restocked, or work spaces left unclean, they earned points for correcting the

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<sup>26</sup> I learned later that Sean misses more classes and has recently been court ordered to attend school as part of his probation. Ms. Scott was helping him, along with the counselor, and he started coming in and working with her during third period for his off hour, in addition to coming to art class. She also allowed him to do alternative projects. In talking with Sean, I learned that he loves computers but got in trouble and was banned from using them at school because he was caught hacking. Over the course of the two weeks of observations, I saw a pretty dramatic change in him as he worked with Ms. Scott, settles in, and seems to trust that he's accepted. It was pretty powerful to watch.

problem and the other class lost points as a result. Ms. Scott told me that since she implemented this plan students had done a much better job, and in fact I saw students take their tasks seriously.

Remnants of past patterns snuck in on occasion, and I was actually taken aback by the sheer power of the negative energy of some of the students around assuming responsibility. I offer a couple of scenarios to show the tension Ms. Scott still faced:

Ms. Scott asks a student to put a new purple container of paint into the paint box for her table (each table has its own box of paints with which to work). The student gets upset and doesn't want to do it. She eventually gets up and puts in an old container of watered-down purple paint she'd made instead of filling up a new container.

A student talks with Ms. Scott about using a paint splattering method for her piece. Ms. Scott asks her to please do it in the back and to put newspaper on the floor and goes on to help others. Instead of setting up in back, she begins splattering paint around others and making a mess on the floor. Ms. Scott notices and quietly talks with her and tells her this is why she wanted her to work in the back over newspaper. The student stays where she is and says she will clean up the floor. Her table mates don't seem to mind, so Ms. Scott waits to see what happens. The student eventually cleans up. The next day I observe the student using the same technique, but she puts down newspaper before she begins.

Most of the students assumed their responsibilities eagerly and felt frustrated with those who struggled. At one point a student told his tablemate who complained about cleaning, "Everybody blames everybody; who cares? Just do it." However, what really made a difference is that everyone stayed in the fight; they realized that caring for the materials ultimately reflected how they cared for each other. Some had a longer way to go and needed more practice, but the systems Ms. Scott established ensured they would get that practice.

### **Feeling free to create.**

Emphasizing respect and community ultimately laid the foundation for students to feel comfortable taking creative risks. Furthermore, the sense of control over their environment empowered students to also take control over their art production and creative processes as well. Students drew heavily upon the relationships they built with Ms. Scott and each other when working, something Ms. Scott hoped to achieve and did.

### ***Nurturing creativity.***

The way in which Ms. Scott started each day and introduced her lessons enabled students to practice creative thinking and foundational skills, as well as connect their learning to the world around them. Every morning when I arrived, Ms. Scott updated her chalkboard, which she'd divided to make a chart with different sections for each class. The upper division of each section had the warm-up activity or prompt for the day. Sometimes the activity involved doing research, such as reading about the importance of color and design in Japanese food and art. Higher order questions, beyond the "knowledge" level, always guided the research. For the Japanese food and art research, Ms. Scott asked "How are food and culture connected?" and "How do details affect our life?" She wanted students to use information from the reading and connect it to their personal experiences, essential for both understanding and creativity.

Most times Ms. Scott had written prompts asking students to use their imaginations in an effort to help them practice creative thinking and apply technical skills relevant for the current projects. For example, one day she asked students to "Draw something peeling apart in layers." Students drew everything from the trite (a peeling

banana) to the gruesome but terribly creative (flesh peeling off an arm). She also had students draw: a holiday page (any holiday they wanted, including birthdays or unique celebrations); a light bulb from at least three different perspectives; and the skate park of your dreams (among other things). Tapping into emotions and feelings served as a priority for the warm-ups as well. Ms. Scott wanted to have students draw upon their emotions in the artistic process and used the warm-ups as a way to practice this connection. One prompt for the Advanced-2D students asked them to choose one thing in their lives that could stay the same. Passionate discussions resonated while they drew their sketches, students choosing to keep their personality, heritage, friends, or family. Ms. Scott told them that, “Change isn’t always bad; some things could change for the good.” Ultimately the students learned more about themselves and shared what mattered to them with Ms. Scott and their peers.

In addition to facilitating conceptual creativity, Ms. Scott taught foundational skills that helped them express their imaginings. I did not observe any large-group instruction as the students were finishing up projects for the end of the semester, but I did see Ms. Scott play games with the students to review art theory and principles. Just before my visit, the 2D students learned about color theory and had practiced the information. During my visit, Ms. Scott reviewed the material in a game where she held up different images and students had to call out which aspect of color theory it involved (e.g., complimentary colors, tertiary colors, primary colors, etc.).<sup>27</sup> She encouraged students to use their notes and teammates as resources. They had fun racing each other to

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<sup>27</sup> Ms. Scott taught the students a fun mnemonic to remember complimentary colors, “The Broncos (blue and orange) play the Vikings (yellow and purple) at Christmas (red and green).” The students loved it and it worked for them!

see who could make the connection first. This game served as preparation for a game of color tag they would be playing the week after my observations.

I also saw countless situations where Ms. Scott worked one-on-one with students to teach them a new skill or go more in depth on something she had already taught. In all cases, the instruction enabled students to make what they saw in their mind's eye. For example, an Advance 2D student could not grasp the concept of how using more than one color for a background would give it depth. Ms. Scott had taught the class blending and depth before, but conceptually it still made no sense to her. Ms. Scott sat with her a long while to demonstrate the method, and returned several times when the student worked on her own to check for understanding and application of the method. The young woman practiced the technique and fell in love with the product, thrilled that it added depth and a professional feel to her painting. When Ms. Scott heard how the student felt and saw her work, she celebrated ever so slightly and said, "Yea! Learning!"

In the beginning 2D class a young man's work remained very flat, lacking in perspective. He had learned enough to critique his efforts and see that he needed to learn how to add depth to the piece; he asked Ms. Scott to teach him how to paint clouds and the process begins:

Ms. Scott: Think about the clouds as a form; it's three dimensional.  
(He wants her to do one; she says she will on another sheet of paper. Ms. Scott takes about five minutes to model how to paint clouds. He watches and then begins to try on his canvas. Perceptually his work has been very basic 2D. With this technique he definitely stretches himself and keeps working and reworking the different colors to get the form. Later on he comments about how hard it is, but he keeps trying. Eventually he lets go of the literal cloud and explores texture. He still struggles with the concepts of shadow and billowing. He can't mechanically or conceptually grasp it; he's still in the left hemisphere. Eventually his cloud emerges and is far superior to other, flatter elements on his painting. He

calls Ms. Scott over to get her opinion.)

MS: Do you think I'm done?

Ms. Scott: Do you think you're done?

MS: Yeah.

Ms. Scott: Then you're done.

Ms. Scott congratulated him on his efforts and helped him critique his growth and assess areas for improvement. She provided this same kind of detailed support and instruction for her photography, 2D, and 3D students, whether helping a student learn how to use acrylics to mimic shadowing with pencil, etch patterns into leather-hardened clay, or determine the correct exposure for a photograph. Sometimes her input added just that little bit of information necessary to help students feel confident and proud of their work:

(Ms. Scott talks with Alexa about her painting.)

Ms. Scott: That looks really beautiful.

Alexa: Thank you.

(They talk a little bit about method, shading, and values. Ms. Scott compliments it again.)

Alexa: Thank you so much, because I was wondering how it was.

One unique skill Ms. Scott taught the students that led to an explosion of creative ideas and products was how to build their own canvases. A local lumber company had donated wood, and Ms. Scott had taught the students how to build frames, stretch untreated canvas, and then treat the canvas with gesso. Students built canvases of all different shapes and sizes, some even combined multiple canvases to make one complex whole. The cost of each unit was a fraction of less innovative, standard pieces, allowing students to not only make canvases for class assignments but for their personal enjoyment as well.

After helping students practice creative thinking via the warm-ups and develop their technical skills, Ms. Scott felt comfortable pushing their work. She would give



students an assignment to portray their “world view” conceptually, or tell a memory/story via images. For example students had the confidence to study the work of one dead artist and one living and merge their two styles together to create something entirely their own. When they were stuck, Ms. Scott knew they simply needed a jump start and offered advice on how to effectively brainstorm, such as thinking about “Questions I have,” “Mysteries of life to me,” or “Things that fascinate me about people.” If they still struggled, Ms. Scott would work one-on-one with them, in the same way she did when teaching specific skills.

Frequently Ms. Scott shared her own artwork to inspire the students. For the holiday page in their sketchbooks, Ms. Scott had drawn a sample the night before. The students clamored to see what she’d drawn and expressed their admiration for her work and an appreciation of her humor:

(A female student looks at Ms. Scott’s holiday picture in the sketchbook. She laughs at the humor in the picture, a street shopping scene with lots of faces of angry people. She loves it and talks with a friend about all of the emotions they see in the picture.)

FS: I love it!

Ms Scott: It took me three hours yesterday.

FS: That’s so cool.

They also talked about seeing Ms. Scott’s paintings in an art show at the local library last year. They couldn’t believe how creative and talented she was and expressed a desire to keep working at their own art to achieve her level of success. Her work is heavily conceptual, something she aims for her students to achieve through their work.

Through open-ended assignments, students have the freedom express any ideas that arise:

A young woman tries to capture the mess of life in her painting. She uses texture to reflect what stands out in life. She’s sketched veins on the woman’s neck to express stress. Buildings represent the environment (she loves cities); wire

underneath the city stands for confusion but that's balanced by the sense of being on a path (solid form on both ends of the wire). Her depiction of poker and money represents wealth which the woman in the picture likes. Ultimately the woman in the painting is rising from her environment.

A young woman shows me her world view piece she'd already finished. It was a Warhol style (four panels) with dollar bill symbols over black and gold and splatters of color on top of that. She said the colors represent people's personalities and they should always be over money. She used what she'd learned about color theory to inform her work.

Ms. Scott also designed assignments that lent themselves to both a creative use of materials and creative thought. One project had students build sculptures out of found objects (many donated by the local thrift store); they also had to write an artist statement describing how the sculpture reflected something larger than itself. The artist statements moved both Ms. Scott and me as we read them during her planning periods.

"One person's trash is another person's treasure," was what I had in mind when the project began. So I started to think of what I treasured in my life, and quickly came to the conclusion, music. Unfortunately, many kids are deprived of the things they need to make music in some schools. I then decided that I would represent music through this piece, and used found objects to build a DJ on stage...Every child is full of potential, and deserves to have equal opportunity to do anything they want to do. This is why we use art to initiate change. It has the ability to initiate change because it shows obviously what is important to people.

The simplest thing can be found in an object, a best friend. And for many children the comfort of knowing that they always had a friend with them no matter where they go can change everything. Yes, the materials that make up such an important thing are not symbolic, but when they are put together they can change lives.

Ms. Scott was shaping students' minds in ways that helped them understand the world around them and envision change and possibilities through their art.

They helped each other see creative possibilities as well. The students worked with each other continually, offering advice on color choices, construction methods, framing, lighting, and more. Whether sailing easily through the artistic process or

weathering tough times, students worked closely with each other. Sometimes students got stuck and exploded like lightning from dark clouds:

FS: Grr! I'm so mad right now!

(She was trying to glue together broken pieces of a plate, and it's not working).

MS: You should try to clamp them.

(She doesn't get what he's saying and gets even more frustrated for a bit. She ponders his advice a while, asks some questions, and then gets up to find the clamps.)

FS: Miss Scott, where are those clamps I used the other day?

(Ms. Scott doesn't hear her so she walks up to her; Ms. Scott tells her they're in the clamp drawer. Once she gets them, her friend brainstorms with her a little bit longer on how to make it work, and she fixes the plates.)

This give and take - offering advice, having it rejected, persisting and working through problems - repeated over and over in different combinations. Laying a foundation for open communication afforded students the chance to draw on the ideas, skills, and expertise of others whether learning how to shape a large bowl out of clay, conduct research on the computer, blend colors to create the feel of a sunset, or simply sit and brainstorm on how to represent their ideas visually. Having student complete peer evaluations supported student growth and their ability to impact the creative expression of others. One student talked about this process:

We actually do peer-review, and we'll like take our projects out into the commons and set each on a separate table, and then we'll walk around. There's a piece of paper and you write down what could've been different, and what they did really, really well, and then you sign it. And Ms. Scott, she'll come around and she'll talk to the people about what they wrote on the project, and ask 'em why they said it.

The students refined their connoisseurship of art, which in turn shaped their own work and enhanced Ms. Scott's ability to realize her intentions. Perhaps more significantly, students learned about each other through the creative process, helping them see how

complex people are which gave them a greater appreciation of the human condition. As one student shared:

Some people wear everything on the outside and put that into their art. Other people you find out that you didn't know anything about them through what they say in their art. It's like, "Wait a minute. Where did they get the inspiration for that? I didn't know that about them." It's just like, "Whoa!"

### **Student perceptions: The artist's way**

The student interviews and essays showed the special place art and Ms. Scott's art classes had in their lives. Her focus on building a creative and caring community in which to teach, inspire, and motivate, resonated with the students and motivated them to take art into other areas of their lives. They also talked about the stark contrast between this setting and others they encountered at school, encouraging adults to take a look at how they do things and perhaps consider alternative approaches.

### ***Going with the flow.***

Yet again the theme of relaxation and getting away from other pressures surfaced as critical for the students. It was not the case that they wanted to escape hard work, they wanted to escape doing the same thing over and over, being told what they could and could not do all the time, and lack of control over their own movement and decision-making. The art room provided the perfect balance of freedom and responsibility that enabled the students to feel like capable and worthy young adults.

Well in art you can listen to music and it helps a lot because it kinda brings a flow of its own, and you get into a better mood. Like science class, you just hear the teacher talking the whole time and you zone out of it sometimes, and you don't really completely get the whole class period. When you're in art, you can just kinda flow with whatever's going on. Everybody's nice and relaxed 'cause they don't have to be writing papers. You have a really relaxed environment, but still you have to work hard to get your project done, to make it look good. ~Mark, Advanced 2D student

Well, I have physics, so I mean, it's like a big leap. 'Cause physics you have to sit there and listen, and study, and take notes, and all this stuff. In art, you're more relaxed. I mean, you have to take notes every once in awhile, but, most of the time you just get to sit there and think about what you want to do. You get to have more fun in the art room than in any other classes. It goes back to the relaxed feel. I mean, it's kinda weird to consider it, but in physics and all the other classes, you have to sit there and listen. In art, it's more like home, 'cause you just get to sit down and do what you want, and then, if you need something, you just get up and go get it without asking permission. You just go get it. In any other class, you have to say, "Oh, can I sharpen my pencil? Can I do this? Can I do that?"

~Trace, Photography and 3D student

I feel comfortable with the other people in the class, like I can be, "Oh, can you help me figure this out? What do you think would be a better idea?" Or, you know, one time I had to take a picture of someone as a reference and I'm like, "Oh, would anyone help me out," and people were really willing. ~Alexa, Advanced 2D student

It's just relaxing, I think, 'cause there's always people's art around on the walls and on the ceilings. I think it makes it more relaxing because you're like, "Cool art." When we come in there's always music playing. And other classes, it's always plain, and you're just sitting there. ~Bethany, Advanced 2D student

You walk into a regular classroom and it's boring walls, nothing really on 'em. And then you walk into the art room, and you see other's people art. You can see what their ideas were, and it can inspire you to do something along those lines or help you think of something new. It's colorful, so you can really bring out your imagination. ~Mark, Advanced 2D student

In some classes, you have raise your hand before you get out of your seat, and you have to ask the teacher, "Can I please go throw this in the trash." You're tired because all you want to do is get up and throw it in the trash. In art you don't have to raise your hand. If we raised our hand every time we had to move, Ms. Scott would never get anything done. ~Bethany, Advanced 2D student

It's like if you're in math class, you sit there the entire time unless you've gotta sharpen your pencil or hole punch. There's not much leeway for physical movement. I think the only other class that compares to the amount of movement I do in art class is gym. I'm more energized. I can focus better. I think if we just did like five jumping jacks or something in the middle of the class, I would be so much more relaxed, I would be happier, I would be more energized, I would be able to do well. It's like, in science we've gotta ask to get up from our seat every time we want to blow our nose. That's a bit extreme, I think. And it's like, "Man, I'm going cold sitting here. My blood isn't moving. How's it supposed to get up

to the top of my head? How am I supposed to do well if I can't circulate?" I think that helps and time just flies by in art because of that. ~Kacy, 3D student

Honestly, I think the art class should be longer. I mean, you get started, and you get five or 10 minutes into your project, and then you have to put it away. So, you're only getting about five or 10 minutes of work each day. With me, I have two art classes and a free hour, so I'm always in the art room; I'm always working on my stuff and it helps me a lot being in there 'cause then I can get further with my project and make sure it's done right. ~Trace, Photography and 3D student

***Ms. Scott.***

Humor, compassion, creativity, and trust surfaced repeatedly when students talked about Ms. Scott. They felt inspired by her curiosity and creativity. They also appreciated her willingness to help them practice what it means to negotiate relationships, challenges, and other facets of adult life. She was a significant person in their lives who made them feel special and encouraged them to do the same for others.

She really wants you to grow. She'll come over and you'll be doing something where she's able to help you figure out which direction to go, to really help you grow as an artist to get to a different point. From there on you can keep going. ~Alexa, Advanced 2D student

She just tries to fit in with everybody, and she's a really good teacher that way because she can talk to everybody. She'll wander around and ask if you need help and help you; she'll cut clay for you, or show you how to do a photo. She wants to be there, she wants you to succeed in life and that really helps when somebody is there helping you along. It really helps a lot, knowing somebody is there that you can talk to. ~Trace, Photography and 3D student

I don't know. Like you just get a good vibe. She just gives off a good vibe cuz she's usually really calm and relaxed. She's never really yelling at people. She stays pretty mellow all the time, so you just can talk to her. Also, she's kinda like little kids almost, cuz she's always creative and wacky all the time. She's not always like dressed up in a suit. She comes in with giant shoes that have rainbow laces on 'em. She's just creative. ~Mark, Advanced 2D student

Everybody succeeds in the class 'cause Ms. Smith just makes it fun for everybody. There are kids in there who don't really care and are just like, "Whatever," and they're struggling a little bit; but, Ms. Smith helps 'em out. And

then there're kids like me; I just go for it, you know, I just go all out on everything, and she's there too. ~Trace, Photography and 3D student

I think she's very maternal-like. If she finds out something is wrong or somebody is upset, she'll sit with that student and work 'em through it. Like, "Hey, what's going on? Are you alright?" She notices that you're kind of down, and she does notice. She'll be like, "Are you okay?" She'll just keep checking up on ya. And, she can tell if you want to talk and if you don't. And if you're like, "No, no. I'm fine," she won't push it. But if you sound like, "I'm fine, I'm okay, I guess." She'll be like, "Well, do you want to talk?" And it's like, "Sweet! That's what I needed." Somebody who wants to talk about this. They actually care about my life, not just doing what they should. ~Kacy, 3D student

Sometimes I see her out of school, like skiing, and she doesn't just kinda ignore you like she's just your teacher. And she talks to you and asks how your day is going. And she just cares how you're doing that day and everything. ~Mark, Advanced 2D student

In any other class they just tell you what to do and how to do it and everything. Ms. Smith, she just kinda tells you, gives you an idea, and if you get stuck in a spot she'll help you through it and then let you figure it out on the way up, and that really helps you learn how to get to that spot. She's an amazing teacher. She helps with everything. ~Trace, Photography and 3D student

I think she's a really helpful teacher. I don't know how to say it; she'll help you if you need it. And she tries to say stuff that you'll understand. Like she tries to teach stuff or say stuff how everyone will understand it, you know. She's really hands-on with teaching, and I think a lot of people like that. Like when we did this hands assignment, we had a partner and we were trying to mirror each other's movements. And everyone thought that was the most funnest thing, it was so funny. I really like how she does that. She'll give us tons of examples; we'll watch an informational video on other artists and styles. She's funny, really outgoing, doing crazy stuff, like learning nicknames, playing fun games to learn color schemes or line, shape, color. She's really funny. I don't know, I just think she explains well and helps a lot. ~Bethany, Advanced 2D student

Well, she's not just strict. She doesn't make you do exactly just one thing. She lets you be creative with your project and do whatever, really just as long as it follows her borderline. She's pretty laid back. She has her rules, but then you can do whatever you want really as long as it doesn't break those laws pretty much. It makes it a lot easier to go to class and just work, 'cause she's not talking the whole time, she doesn't like to hear herself talk that much, I don't think. So she'll just talk when you need her really, and then after that she'll just let you go on your own. ~Mark, Advanced 2D student

For one student, having a teacher who was the polar opposite of Ms. Scott, made her appreciate Ms. Scott even more and ponder why someone would be a teacher if they didn't want to know about or care for their students.

I have a teacher now who teaches science. I remember the first day, when someone talked about something outside class, and he wasn't trying to be mean, but he said something along the lines of, "I don't really care about the other things going on in your life. I'm not going to ask about them. This is science and this is what I'm going to focus on." The first day having that class and that teacher, I was like, "Oh. I'll just see how this goes." It's just awkward having a teacher set that tone, to say, "Just so you know, this is my goal and your other things in your life are kind of whatever." Knowing that Ms. Scott is the opposite of that; still the standards are high, but it's still very comfortable and, she's very connected with you, personable, not like she's a high authority figure. She is, but it's still very relatable, is how I feel. ~Alexa, Advanced 2D student

Another student shared a story about his friend who took art at a different school that made him appreciate Ms. Scott even more:

Well, I have family in Denver [that I visit] and once, one of my really good friends there, who is a really amazing artist, I told her about my class and how we get a project, and we get to be imaginative about it. And she was kinda upset because in her school, she's in one of the most advanced like classes at her school, a senior this year, and she still has to follow exactly what the teacher says – exact colors, exact materials. They don't get any freedom with what they're doing, they just have to do what the teacher tells them and that's it. ~Mark, Advanced 2D student

### ***The artist's way.***

Because of their interactions with Ms. Scott and the art classroom, students looked at the world differently, interacted with their parents and peers in new ways, and held a special affection for their artistic sensibilities. They were different as a result of their work with Ms. Scott, either more committed to passions that they'd had their entire lives, more skilled, or appreciative of the inspiration she instilled in them. Her creativity and passion inspired them to follow the artist's way.



She is definitely creative. I went to one of her art shows outside of school. I saw her media project, and it was so mindboggling, like, “Oh my goodness. This is my art teacher? I am so lucky because she’s got newspaper she’s splattered, she’s got drippings, she’s got layering; she’s got out of this world stuff.” And it’s like, “Where do you get this from?” I couldn’t even comprehend it. I had to just sit there for two hours and just stare at them all. I literally sat in that room, cross-legged, just staring at them. A few librarians came up and they were like, “Excuse me. Are you alright.” And I’m like, “Yeah. I’m just so amazed.” And maybe that’s just me, but it was wow! I hope it affected other people because it was amazing. ~Kacy, 3D student



*Figure 15. A friend’s picture (Mark’s friend)*

I told my friend, “I have to take pictures because this person is trying to get her degree and all that, and I’m taking pictures for her.” And he was like, “Well, I want to take a picture too then.” That one was just kinda looking through trees. ~Mark, Advanced 2D student



*Figure 16. Seeing beauty in a muddy, cracked bus window (Mark)*

That one, we were on the bus and there was a dirty window, and I thought that would be kinda cool to take a picture of. ~Mark, Advanced 2D student



It is actually a Coca-Cola glass that I got from McDonald's. And I had juice in it. I took the picture without the juice in it, and I couldn't really see the lettering on it very well, and then I took it again and you can see the couch behind it, and then it just kinda showed the perspective that this is a well-known product, but behind it, there's relaxation. So it kinda balances industry, then calm. ~Trace, Photography, 3D student

*Figure 17. Industry and calm (Trace)*



Yeah, I feel art definitely has opened my eyes to view different things, you know, shapes. I was sitting there and it just caught my eye, just how it is like art, but it was just like so beautiful. I'm like, "I need to capture that." ~Alexa, Advanced 2D student

*Figure 18. Something beautiful catching your eye (Alexa)*



I have been trying hard to work on value, so hard. See how it goes light to gray, gray to dark, to light to gray, really dark. I ask, "How can you make it better? What can YOU do? What can you change? What do you want to do?" Not just in the classroom, I think about it outside now. I used to not do that. ~Bethany, Advanced 2D student

*Figure 19. A study in the principle of value (Bethany)*



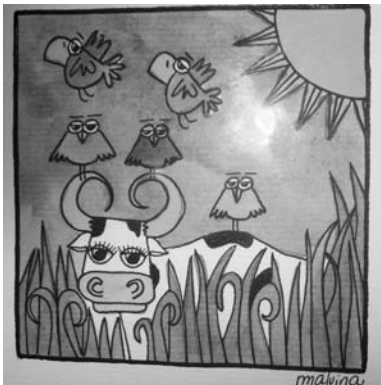
This is kind of cheesy, but in a sense, I feel like my style, my life, is somewhat art infused. You know? And I just thought, if you take all the art out of my life, like I've never had any, I think I would ultimately be a different person. In my room, all the things, the way I dress, I think I would be totally different because it's all really art inspired. ~Alexa, Advanced 2D student

Figure 20. A picture composed of artistic clothing (Alexa)



I walk the same path every day, so it's kind of like creating your own path even though sometimes it's difficult because you're walking through like knee-high snow. And there might be pretty things off to the side of the path, like the sparkles in the snow. But sometimes you just gotta keep following what you've built because those other things might lead you to stray off your path and lose where you were going. ~Kacy, 3D student

Figure 21. Staying on the path (Kacy)



An aunt that I hadn't seen in a while bought me that. She knew me well enough and she felt that would be important to me, that I would really cherish it, and I just felt that kind of connection. It definitely was one of my favorite gifts that I had ever gotten. It was just really special to me. ~Alexa, Advanced 2D student

Figure 22. A special gift from an aunt (Alexa)

I'll see somebody walking around town or snowboarding or something and I'll say, "Hey, how's your art project coming along?" That helps a lot too, 'cause you can give them ideas for it, and they can give you ideas on yours. I've been snowboarding a couple of times, and I'll bring it up, and we'll just sit there and talk about it for the lift ride, and then ride down and probably talk about something different. ~Trace, Photography and 3D student

I believe if you actually do create something, it starts this feeling, and it's like, "Oh wow. I am worth something. I can create something. I'm not a failure." And then it doesn't matter if you got that feeling in art class. It's like, "Well, maybe if I actually tried a little I could not be a failure." And then you realize, "Oh. I'm not the failure. What made me think I was a failure?" ~Kacy, 3D student

## **Ms. Wright**

Ms. Wright's first email to me indicated that she cared deeply about her students and took her responsibility to do so for them seriously. She gravitated to the study because it described exactly what she valued in her teaching, and it motivated her to want to better understand the process; as she said, "I hope to gain understanding of my role as a teacher in a caring, creative classroom." By helping her understand her role, Ms. Wright also believed that what was learned would "hopefully aid others through providing my class as a model." In her email Ms. Wright shared that:

Caring is showing genuine concern and making the effort to understand and get to know others. To be caring means listening to and being considerate of other people. Caring means to nurture other people, be with them through the tough times and being honest with them when they need to hear it. Creativity is the expression of ideas, style and emotions. Creativity can be a part of every person's life. Creativity enhances people's lives.

Her responses suggested to me that the topics of caring and creativity were important for her and topics she quite possibly pondered on a regular basis. When I first met her, Ms. Wright wore a black long-sleeved top, a fashionable scarf, and gray soft cotton pants. Her smile eased any worries I had about traveling so far, to this small rural town four hours outside Perth. Talking with her and getting a sense of her passion first-hand made me eager to learn how her energy impacted the students. She exuded both an internal and external calm and beauty that I imagined inspired her students. Through both who she was as a person and her philosophical values, Ms. Wright imbued her classroom with caring actions and subsequently succeeded in bringing her vision of creativity to life.

### **Camden Grammar School**

Half a world away from Colorado, looking out over the ocean from a high point on the edge of a small rural farming, fishing, and shipping community lies Camden Grammar School, a private religious primary through year 12 school. Many of the students plan on attending university and the school holds high standards to help them achieve their goals; the remaining students attend technical programs in a chosen field or go straight to work. Bright fuchsia bougainvilleas frame the driveway entrance to the multi-building campus. Students walk outside from class to class and wide athletic fields skirt the grounds. Even in the middle of winter, green grass grows on the fields, contrasting beautifully with the ruddy earth-tone of the single-story buildings. Ms. Wright teaches along with one other secondary level visual arts teacher and one primary art teacher. The school did not keep ethnic statistics on the students.<sup>28</sup> From my observations and interviews, I determined the following: Of the 43 students observed, two students identified themselves as Pacific Islanders; one identified herself as biracial Asian-American and Australian; one identified himself as American Indian and Australian; one identified himself as part Aboriginal; three were exchange students from South Africa, Chile, and Switzerland; and the remainder identified themselves as Australian, non-Aboriginal. Only two of the students in the art classes were on scholarship, and Ms. Wright suggested that a few others had to make sacrifices to pay tuition.

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<sup>28</sup> Overall, other than attention to gathering data on Aboriginal students, the Western Australian Department of Education did not maintain ethnic information for public schools, nor did either private school in the study. This finding provides a potentially interesting cross-cultural study to examine why there is such a difference in attention to ethnicity in the United States as compared to Western Australia.

### **Intentions: Preparing for the unconventional.**

Just as with Mr. Cole and Ms. Carter, Ms. Wright believes that students' experiences provide them endless opportunities for exploration and creativity. From her perspective, art allows students "to be very expressive about their own personality and thoughts, and they can be themselves." She sees her role, in part, as helping students tap into who they are and what they know so they can work conceptually in rich and meaningful ways.

I think in terms of creativity, kids that really have a good grasp of the world around them show a good creativity level [because] they can draw from lots of different things that are happening in their lives and experiences.

At the same time, Ms. Wright's intentions reflect a desire to broaden the lens with which they look at themselves and the world around them. She realizes that the classroom environment and the ways in which she interacts with the students have to mirror genuine human interactions (versus top-down power systems traditionally found in schools) as well as honor and examine divergent ways of thinking and being:

There are a lot of perceived characteristics of what a teacher is and what a teacher does. When I was at University a lecturer once said to us that teaching was a profession for conservative people, and yet we have to prepare students for a world that is far from conventional or predictable. I don't think I am radical as a person, and I know that there have to be rules and systems, but I believe that the classroom should be a tangible and flexible thing. I teach students about artists from all eras of history that are rebellious, who challenge society and break with tradition. I ask students to strive to be original and to challenge themselves and the world around them. I don't think it would be possible to teach them in a traditional teaching and learning environment. I think that is really important.

Teaching students essential skills and exposing them to a wide variety of artistic media supports this vision. She believes that she never knows which media will resonate with students and therefore exposes them to a broad array of artists and media in order to help

them make a connection. Pushing students creatively to go past the obvious first thought serves as a core aim for Ms. Wright as well:

I always try to get them to experiment a lot with the materials that they use and think of different materials that could be used that we haven't thought of. I try to give them some sort of interesting fact about the materials, like where they come from or how it is made...I will always open to them and encourage the next step in the process: "Okay that's great, now can you alter this or change this?" and "If you are designing a whole new printing process, maybe you can think of something that no one else has ever thought of. What do you think you can do with this?"

Her hope is that by helping students develop how they think about and produce art, she can help them see the world in different and meaningful ways. As with the other teachers, the actual, tangible products that students craft play a significant role in building confidence and motivating them to incorporate art in their lives:

To have the ability to create something is something that we all take for granted. Part of what we do as art teachers can be compared to holding a mirror so that students can see themselves being creative. Teaching students to recognize their own creative processes is an important part of what I do. If they are aware of how the creative process works and how the steps in the cycle work inside their heads, then I know that they are really learning about art.

To achieve this type of metacognition Ms. Wright considers a compassionate community indispensable for enabling students to take creative risks and grow as people and artists.

Within this social structure, students learn to value the group while at the same time allowing each other to be unique and work as individuals:

I guess that the classroom is a miniature version of society, and like society people have to learn to work and live with each other despite our differences and difficulties. As artists, they are individuals and work differently. Some students prefer to move away from the group and put their iPod on and work on their own. Some feel they need to work with others around them. The other kids know to respect their style of working and their space. I guess I encourage them to work positively, to be encouraging and respect the differences.



She hopes they step up and meet their responsibilities for each other while honoring their individuality. For Ms. Wright, the ultimate overarching goal is “positivity,” students reflecting back on their time with her and each other and feeling good about what they accomplished, how they helped their peers, and the overall experience.

The reasons they are here don’t really matter in the end, what matters is how they feel when they leave. Some of them say that they just want to do well; some do a lot more than that. I just want them to walk out and know that they’ve done their best and that I have done as much as I can for them.

Her intentions address wide-ranging facets of human experience but ultimately distill down to wanting to infuse a sense of joy or happiness with themselves, their peers, her as a teacher, and the artistic process.

### **The art shed.**

I wonder at first if I headed in the right direction because I see what looks like a maintenance shed in front of me. As I turn the corner and duck under the partially opened garage door, I realize that the only comparison to a maintenance shed is the external structure. Inside, the space bursts with the color and variety of student work. Posters on the elements and principles of design line one section of wall, while student work fills the others. Ongoing work rests neatly on wire shelves or tables. A walled-off section of the shed serves as an office area for Ms. Wright and the other upper school art teacher, rows of resource books are stacked neatly above the desks. Above Ms. Wright’s desk is a bulletin board with articles on awards her students have won, school memos, and information on the study. A separate room just off the office, near the entrance, serves as storage space for all of the art supplies. Students go in and out of the room as needed. A center wall divides the shed into two main rooms, the primary classes being held on the

other side. Adjacent to Ms. Wright's main room is another small area where students can work or store their pieces. The shed is quite cold right now, since it is the middle of winter (not the same winter as Ms. Scott experiences in the mountains, but chilly all the same). Without any temperature control, I imagine how hot the room must get in the fall and late spring, and Ms. Wright's confirms that they frequently swelter in the heat. Large, tall, white-topped tables form a rectangle on the outer edges of the main space; students work on the perimeter and interior of the shape. On the outside of the office wall facing the room, Ms. Wright has a large white board, as well as a color laser printer and computer which both she and the students use for their work. On the whiteboard, one of the students has written, "Art is awesome!" in large letters and punctuated it with a smiley face.

A tea/coffee section sits in the corner, tidy and fully stocked, inviting students and the teacher to help themselves throughout class. A couch, covered with silk pillows made and designed by students, sits mostly unused as students spend most of their time standing or sitting by their work, walking around to get materials, or cleaning. Occasionally, however, a student flops down on the couch, usually two who laugh together for a quick break. Students talk about school and life outside of school as they work. The conversations range from serious worries to light conversation about the weekend. The environment oozes with comfort and beckons for students to come linger for a while. Students respond to the call. Before school, at lunch time, during off periods, after school, or even over vacations, students seek out the art space.

### **Freedom and laughter.**

From the very first to the very last class I observed, students expressed themselves freely through their interactions with each other and their artwork. This sense of freedom began from the second students put their backpacks down by the main door, untucked their shirts, loosened their ties, rolled up their sleeves, and donned aprons as needed to get to work. Some students immediately put on their iPods and began dancing or singing as they gathered their projects and materials. Others chatted casually as they made a cup of coffee or tea before getting to work. This freedom of expression, primarily for the year 12 students, included referring to Ms. Wright as “Bunty,” a nickname that evolved over their years working with her. She loved that they called her Bunty and valued the genuine relationship she had with the students that made this type of interaction possible. The students loved this freedom coupled with responsibility, and knew that it differed from what they experienced in the rest of the school. A poignant reminder of the structure outside of the art shed occurred when Ms. Wright called a young man to the phone to speak to someone in the main office; on his way over to the telephone he tucked in his shirt in order to look presentable. Another time, two year 12 students were talking about how other teachers perceived Ms. Wright’s connection to her students:

Sammy: Mr. Barron wants to blow up the art shed.

(Because it draws so many students)

Erin: He should just blow Bunty up!

(Because she’s the reason they all love being there)

Their observation mirrors a story Ms. Wright shared with me of a time when the vice principal told a student not to call her Bunty. He did not understand that the nickname was a sign of respect versus disrespect.

During the year 10 class, three year 12 students came in and worked on their projects, two on their own time and one on independent study. They are the top art kids, one of whom is Captain of her house. Bunty told me that the year 12 students are jovial, “They know what they can get away with; they can have a bit of a joke, un-tuck their shirts away from the rest of the school, lounge around and sleep if not well.” Sometimes she had to ask that they quiet down, but they did so immediately, drawing the year 10 students like moths to a flame with the outstanding creativity and quality of their work. What struck me was the kind way they interacted with the younger students, complimenting them on their work, giving them ideas, joking around. Mason, one of the older students, worked during this period several days and each time talked with the year 10 boys and served as a positive role model for continuing art. His attention spoke volumes because Ms. Wright shared that Mason is one of the top football (rugby) players and the younger students look up to him. His efforts made a difference in trying to encourage the boys to take art past year 10, when it is no longer compulsory. Students basically have to choose art over other topics at this point, and choosing art becomes a part of their identity, as expressed in the following scenario:

Henry: I don’t know if I’m an art kid.  
(He’s a social butterfly, reluctant to commit to starting his work.)  
Ms. Wright: Time to make a decision.  
(He started working.)

This pressure to choose, to make a distinction between art and non-art students saddens Ms. Wright; it especially makes her sad when the other teachers “don’t have a clue how talented their students are,” winning top prizes in the annual state “Year 12 Perspectives” art show and other accomplishments. Regardless, she focuses on making the art shed

their best memory of upper school and continues to fashion an environment where they love to be with each other and make amazing art.

In addition to the classes, I observed students coming in during other periods and after school as well. They would come in and get coffee, set up their work, talk with each other about their projects, and then settle in. One day after school, students were still in the room at 5:20 p.m. They told me they didn't have to leave so "we decided to stay." Ms. Wright made this time possible and in turn created a feeling of control over their environment and the freedom to immerse themselves in making art as a result. She shared that seeing the students interact more freely, whether during class or on their own time, she was able to listen to their conversations and get to know them better; she said if someone wanted to know what was going on with students, good or bad, all they had to do was ask. Even students who graduated, or no longer took art, stopped by to work, have lunch, or just see Bunty and the other students.

During class time, the students moved about freely to gather supplies, brainstorm with a classmate, talk with Ms. Wright, or clean their materials. Waves of conversation moved in and out, punctuated by stretches of silence when the students focused on the work at hand. The students welcomed me into their rhythm and allowed me to talk with them about their work and experiences in art. At one point in the year 10 class, a young man accidentally flicked a hard plastic bag tie tab and it hit my hair; he smiled and I smiled back, acknowledging his intention to kid around with another student. Sometimes students would meander, looking at others' work, needing time to process. They had the freedom to regulate when and how they worked, Ms. Wright keeping tabs on them

through one-on-one conferences about their portfolios and works in progress. The systems of the classroom were almost invisible. Students simply knew that they needed to clean any mess they made and they did so. About 10 minutes from the end of each period Ms. Wright would start a countdown, and at seven minutes remaining she made sure they were cleaning. She only had to ask twice in order to tear students away from their work. Tables were always wiped down, tools cleaned, and projects put away to ensure the room stood ready for the next group. Students always readily helped each other as needed. This aspect of classroom life seemed almost non-existent for the ease with which it happened.

This sense of camaraderie overflowed into more structured parts of the lessons as well. At one point students presented Power Point lessons they developed to their peers. The students gathered in the entryway by the main garage door, pulling up chairs and sitting on the couch in order to see the screen. They listened attentively and genuinely, not being forced to take in the information but rather were eager to learn what their classmate had to share. Humor would even infuse these situations:

(Katy asks for someone to be her clicker. Several students raise their hands and she selects Linda and says thanks. Jason moves to the couch as Linda vacates it. Katy uses note cards for her presentation. Her peers help her with pronunciation of a word. She's presenting information on a female Australian artist at the turn of the century.)

Katy: Never doing any of the normal, wifey sort of stuff. (About the female artist she studied)

(A few slides later some of the students start chuckling at the spelling of "Chinees.")

Katy: What?

Erin: Check your spelling of "Chinese."

Katy looks at it and laughs.

Ms. Wright: Don't forget to share your notes.

(The students all printed their notes to give to everyone. When she's done, her classmates and even one year 11 student working in the shed applaud.)

Each interaction showed an authentic appreciation of their relationships, efforts, and contribution to the community. They valued being treated like young adults, the antithesis of which they frequently experienced in other classes:

FS1: I hate English

FS2: You're good at English; you're in Literature. (A competitive TEE class)

FS1: Yeah.

FS2: The teacher treats us like we're in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.

They also felt confident in their ability to be there for each other and to produce amazing works of art, and they attributed their success to the caring environment fashioned by their teacher that shaped their experiences.

### **Skills-based explosions of creativity.**

Ms. Wright put a premium on the importance of skill development in order for students to make their imaginations come to life. And if they didn't have a particular skill, she would either sit down with them to teach them or enlist the help of experts in the community. For example, Ms. Wright currently had one year 12 student focusing on photography and another on ceramic sculpture. Not being expert in either field, she arranged for them to go to the studios of a photographer and sculptor in town, more than once, who taught them requisite skills that enabled them to make their visions come to life.

I observed her teaching specific skills lessons to both the year 10 and year 11 students. In both situations the students hung on her every word, testaments to her method in the form of year 12 student art work displayed around the room. They trusted that she knew what she was doing based on what they saw and wanted to learn the techniques and methods that would enable them to realize their potential. I observed her

reviewing color theory with the year 10 class and helping them understand value as it relates to color. She wrote a review/reminder of points she'd covered previously on the board, "Tints: colour + white; Shades: colour + black; Secondary value scale: secondary colour + black and white (light to dark)." Before they started practicing with paints, she quizzed them on the concepts to check for understanding and then helped the students practice the concepts on their own color wheels and tinting strips. Reflective of wanting to inspire creativity, Ms. Wright caught herself at one point when a student asked her if they needed to stay in the lines with the wheels. She started to say, "Try and paint them in the lines," but then replied, "Oh no, you don't have to."

This attention to both skill development and creativity spiraled throughout all of the classes I observed. When working with the year 11 students, Ms. Wright painstakingly reviewed earlier lessons about how to render a face. On one particular day, four of the students were out on fieldtrips or sick, and two remained. Ms. Wright sat with them at the back table, each with a mirror, paper, and pencil in front of her, the process ready to unfold:

Ms. Wright goes over the front-on drawing description of  $\frac{3}{4}$ . She also talks about the rule of halves for the face. The students respond and adjust their images if they don't look just right. Ms. Wright talks about keeping their pencil strokes light, to use a light touch; she encourages them to work with speed and a light touch. Students look at her attentively, thoughtful, nodding. She also reviews the distance of fingers from tip of pencil and reinforces where on the pencil the students should grip for different segments of the face. One of the students chuckles as she holds the mirror up to her face. The other is gazing intently in the mirror; a sketched form of her face emerges on the paper. Ms Wright said, "Have you got your basic bits in? Okay, you need to still keep moving your pencil really, really fast. Developing this quick way of working, you know if you do that, well, you've got a great start." After they draw the basic form of the face and its features, she teaches them how to see and draw the hairline.



The immediate feedback and uninterrupted attention allowed the students to refine their techniques right on the spot. Even without this anomaly of only having two students, the way in which Ms. Wright taught how to draw the human face, among other aspects of her teaching gave them tremendous confidence. When it came time to expand upon their work in this area and use what they learned creatively, they had cast off the shackles of doubt and worked freely to let their imaginations unfold. The following year 12 images reflect creativity through the confidence of their skills. No two images are the same, although they are self-portraits. Some have stayed with literal representations of self, while others' work delves into the abstract. I include the images because they communicate the essential connection between competence and a willingness to take risks and the pride that results from the process.



Allison chose to depict herself as the working artist. Her piece won best in show at the “2009 Year 12 Perspectives” exhibition.

*Figure 23. Full length self-portrait (Allison)*



Darren expressed that he felt less talented than his classmates, but had grown tremendously as an artist with Ms. Wright. He lived in a world of words and a busy imagination, and his self-portrait reflects a mind full of activity.

*Figure 24. Face-only self-portrait (Darren)*



Jason was working on shaping a ceramic bust/self-portrait. He kept his head open and planned on putting in some type of structure that demonstrated how he was bursting with ideas. He planned on being an exchange student in Germany in order to study sculpture more in depth. His mother told Ms. Wright she was surprised because she didn't know how much Jason loved art and was pleased because she's an artist.

*Figure 25. Ceramic bust self-portrait. (Jason)*

Ms. Wright, as with all of the teachers, provided a wide assortment of materials with which the students could explore and produce works of art. Being responsible for all of their art education from year 10 until they graduated, her attention to this issue took on special significance because if they didn't have exposure to particular media with her, they might not ever get the opportunity. During my observations I saw students working with acrylic and oil paints on tissue paper and canvas; plaster mixed with paint; digital cameras; and various textile materials including fabrics, wire, and a sewing machine. I

watched one student soak a tea bag, wring it out, and then use it to stain the pages in her portfolio for an aged look. Ms. Wright had an exchange student from Switzerland in her class at the time; she expressed that although art was compulsory at home through 10<sup>th</sup> grade, the methods were much more rigid and restrictive. She loved having the freedom in Ms. Wright's class to try new things and look at her work from a different perspective. Ms. Wright encouraged different perspectives, taking her students to the beach, the local art gallery, and introducing them a wide range of artwork by Australian and other artists over the past century or more. Ms. Wright encouraged one student to draw upon her passion for the ocean. For her project, the student did a study on plastic polluting the oceans. She collected thrown away plastics and sculpted ocean creatures out of them, such as an octopus and a sea star and took photos of these sculptures on the beach in order to symbolize how human waste is destroying their habitat.

In this instance the student worked alone, but most of the time students collaborated with each other and Ms. Wright, sharing ideas, opinions, and recommendations. Ms. Wright modeled and facilitated this type of interaction, patiently allowing students to absorb their work and share their insights with each other. In the following scenario, Ms. Wright had taken her year 11 class to a local artist's printmaking studio, where they learned about and had the opportunity to make their own prints. I observed them the next day, reviewing what they had made:

Ms. Wright: Most successful print - hold it up and tell us why.  
(Students laugh and are talking and passing prints to each other.)  
Ms. Wright: You did heaps Jess.  
(They are looking at the prints carefully.)  
Mary: Should I do that one miss?  
Ms. Wright: I don't know; you decide.

(A few collaborate on decisions, others work silently and alone.)

Mary: This one because there's not too much ink on it.

(Ms. Wright queries her about the composition of the print. Molly asks what she means. Ms. Wright reviews key terms with her and hints for her to get at understanding the concept of asymmetry. Ms. Wright also asks why she didn't select the colored ones. Jen likes one in particular because it looks more like pencil, thinner ink, very even. She says you "can't see my teeth." She also likes it centered perfectly in the middle of the paper. Hannah likes the messy and different feel of hers.)

Ms. Wright: What would you do different? What does everyone else think?

Kristin: It's sick! (In a good way) It's mixed representational; she relates it to Picasso.)

(Sarah thinks her best print has lines that are dark enough.)

Mary: It's an A ++++++

(The cropping gives one a feeling of being close; an intimate view.)

Kristin: I love Emma's. I think it's sick.

Elise: You can see everything.

(Ms. Wright notes that you can learn something about everyone's personality and "get a real sense of person they are" from the prints.)

The creative work Ms. Wright pushed for with her students took time. At least one day a week the students had an extended block in the art room, which they cherished, and sometimes two. On the days when they only had one hour, however, the inevitable cry lamenting the end of class reared its head:

(The class gets away from everyone and soon and Ms. Wright is hurrying everyone to pack up.)

Ms. Wright: Pack up! Chop! Chop!

FS: No! (In dismay that class is over) I've done like 0%!

They compensated for this lack of time by spending every minute possible in the art shed or at home on their work. Several of the students took work home during the week I observed. Ms. Wright also said that she helped as much as she could by being flexible with deadlines when she saw students were working their hardest. The only restriction was that the TEE work had to be ready for the external examination with Ms. Wright and two other teachers in the town.

### **Student perceptions: Special people in a special space.**

The students interviewed expressed a deep attachment to Ms. Wright, the art shed, and the role of art in their lives. The value of the relationships they built with Ms. Wright and each other helped them see sides of themselves untapped in other areas of their life. They felt more whole, like part of them would be missing if they had not learned to see and express what they understood about the world artistically.

#### ***The space.***

Having the art shed as a safe haven where they could laugh, dance, sing, and make art meant the world to the students. They learned how to care for the man-made world in ways that would guide them in their adult lives. The materials with which Ms. Wright decorated the space, and the ongoing student work, served to inspire students creatively. They also realized that a space may seem “ugly” or non-descript, but the caring, interactions, and passion of the people in that space can transform it into a treasure.

Oh! It's so good! Like in the holidays, I miss coming to the art shed, because it's just so relaxing, it feels like...it's not even nice in there (physically)...it's just the people that are in there, and the environment that it creates is just so welcoming...I don't have to, but I come here at lunch anyway. Well, I don't come when I have classes up there, I just come early; I just love the environment. ~Erin, year 12 Textile student

It's not very reserved; we don't have to ask her for everything all the time. She trusts us in that we know what we're doing. In another class I'm not sure what it would be like if they had a subject where they didn't have to be at the front all the time. We definitely don't do that in other subjects, we're just more there to listen and to write. But in art it's definitely very different. ~Erin, year 12 Textile student

It's a more friendly environment. It's very inspirational and a very relaxed setting. There's the tea and coffee and things like that. All the things that we have around the classroom, the people too [are inspirational]. You can look up, and, it's inspirational to see a different viewpoint that somebody's done, or a painting, or a

painting technique that she hasn't taught us before. Like when we were doing impressionism it was an inspiration to look up. ~Elizabeth, year 12 Painting student



I guess, yeah, it's a lot different. It's freer. You can move around. Sometimes when I paint I like to go out back; I don't know why it's just the place where I like to be. There's a good structure there. There're always a lot of people moving around and stuff, and it's free. I like it. You're just free to use your own space. ~Aaron, year 12 Painting student

*Figure 26. Austin's special space. (Juli)*

Um, well, happy, playful, just fun, restful, always fun to keep coming to art class. I look forward to it in my day, still. ~Aaron, year 12 Painting student

Ah, that's the tea section; that's my favorite part of the art room. It's like home to us. I think the environment is one of the most important things for us with art. ~Elizabeth, year 12 Painting student



I chose that because um it's obviously our coffee center. Everyone brings in all the stuff, so I guess it's an example of the communal way of the art room. We all contribute and keep it going. ~Aaron, year 12 Painting student

*Figure 27. Building community through tea (Aaron)*

### ***Ms. Wright.***

From the student perspective, Ms. Wright assumes her responsibility to be the carer in the relationship, but does not let her position of authority dominate. She helps them practice what it means to have a reciprocal caring relationship with an adult in their lives, but makes sure she fulfills her duties as a teacher, whether teaching them skills, inspiring them creatively, or keeping them on task if they struggle to keep organized. She holds high expectations and ensures that she supports the students to ensure they can

meet them. Having Ms. Wright for three years further strengthened the relationship, as well as the skills students developed as a result of having her for a teacher.

Well, she's the driving force behind our art classroom, why I do art, because I enjoy it so much because of her. It's a home environment. It's something where you feel completely comfortable, and she inspires you to do art because she loves it so much it rubs off on everyone else. ~Elizabeth, year 12 Painting student

Well she has to mark with two other teachers from other schools, 'cause we're externally moderated; it's very subjective. I know that she and the other teachers have a hard time to decide what exactly to give someone because they're very different people. And so, with our final products, they just argue until they all decide one grade, but she really pushes for us to get a good mark with them. I know a lot of us weren't expecting to get such good marks because the other teachers would just go, "Ooh, it's an A" and Bunty didn't really know what they'd say, but she was just, "Oh, okay." She's not one to say it's a B if it's from our class; she's like really not going to try and bring our mark down if she doesn't have to. She always says to us you can definitely tell when someone's just tried to draw five drawings the night before just to get more stuff in; she definitely knows the people that are putting effort, she notices the effort you put in and the attitude that you have toward it. So, yeah, she's always taking it into account when she grades your work because it's obvious, you know the people that put in effort and the people that don't. ~Erin, year 12 Textile student

We actually get to see a lot of her artwork, because we go to exhibitions where she has her work. Just looking at her particular style [is inspiring] ~Elizabeth, year 12 Painting student

Oh! (laughing) That's probably about the best part of art is her. When I was little, in year 10, we always knew she was different from other teachers, but having her for three years in a row, she's not even a teacher to us, she's just more like a friend, you know who teaches us art and tells us what to do and stuff. She can still get stern with us, but she has a really great relationship with all of us, so we can tell her anything, but she's still professional. She's a really, really good teacher, but at the same time she's just so much more. ~Erin, year 12 Textile student

She's fun, nice, you know, and laughs. She's a good person, but she also keeps tabs on what we're doing, always closely watching us, and knows what you're doing. She will check our folios each week, detailed, and she will write notes on what we've done and what more we need to do, and just make sure we're going in the right direction. She cares about us and how we're doing really. She also has after school art tutorials where we all get together. She goes the extra mile for us. ~Aaron, year 12 Painting student

Well being able to appreciate somebody for who they are and knowing them. Not a lot of normal teachers do that; she really tries to engage with us. We treat each other in a similar way to what Bunty does; we definitely mirror that. ~Elizabeth, year 12 Painting student

She's the one that coached me into doing textiles. At another school I know, they don't want to; they just want to have painters because it's easy for them. Here we have the most diverse range of styles. I know in another school they have a certain style that the teacher has and all the students seem to have as well. But, here we're all very different, and she knows that we're different and will encourage that, as opposed to doing one thing 'cause it's easier. ~Erin, year 12 Textile student

Well, she knows a lot about a lot of stuff. Like, you see how we do our paintings, with the blue undercoating; I didn't know about it until she showed us. She shows us how to do a lot of different things like sculpture, textiles, that kind of stuff. She also does some stuff in class with us. She did a portrait of me once, a quick sketch. She likes to practice her stuff. It's fun (to see her). It's inspirational, I guess, watching her, when she helps us do stuff. ~Aaron, year 12 Painting student

I know Bunty always says that if you want to be here just because it's fun then I can't help you too much. But if you really want to do well and you want to get an A and you want to do the best that you can, then she can help and it can just be really hard. That's why some people don't like it, because it's really full on and there's just so much work to do to get a good mark. In a way that's just part of the reason why this is good art; it just takes up your entire life basically, and you just immerse yourself in it. ~Erin, year 12 Textile student

### *Colleagues and friends.*

As one of the students shared above, they follow Ms. Wright's lead and mirror her in their treatment of each other. She has helped them build a "tribe," like-minded people with art as a common passion, by providing the space and materials necessary to engage individually and together in something they love.

Well, I think that we have really good relationships where it's a communal atmosphere, where we all help each other. It's a really communal atmosphere. ~Aaron, year 12 Painting student

We're all pretty much really good friends. When I started art in year 11, we all came from different classes so I didn't know everyone. We were from different social groups, and we didn't really know each other. And now I'm really good friends with Aaron, I'm really good friends with Lisa. It seems like in the other



classes you just sit next to your friends, but in art it's more like wherever you end up, just wherever you put yourself down; it's not uncomfortable to sit next to different people, and we all know each other. It's a caring environment and everyone just gets along so well. ~Erin, year 12 Textile student

We've been taught to always appreciate other people's way of art, and to use their examples, and try to incorporate that and just learn from other people. We're always giving examples or getting inspiration from how somebody else approaches it. ~Elizabeth, year 12 Painting student

Art class is very free, and it's very fun, like we're always laughing about something, all the time. It's just a class where you can go, because art's not like other subjects where you have to concentrate all the time, or whatever, writing notes off the board or something. It allows you to show your emotions more and that helps in your art work as well. When you're bouncing ideas off other people it's different than being home alone working on something. When you're here, other people are always giving you advice and Bunty's always giving you advice, so everything turns out a lot better when you're here. ~Erin, year 12 Textile student

In this class, we sort of share a common interest in art that's different to everyone else. There're other classes I don't particularly care for. We all help each other but it's mostly solo; we work in our books, do the questions. Here we're all interested in what everyone else is doing and like working together, like getting ideas off each other. We all chum around ideas and stuff. ~Aaron, year 12 Painting student

Well, I think, we're a lot more laid back than a lot of other classes, but it's still a very competitive but focused class. Everyone has a niche where we are; because we're so close knit, we have our different roles in the class. There're either, the people that we joke about quite a bit, which they like. There're the dominating people in our class, you know you have the loud, outrageous ones. There's ones who are kind of more silent... They're all incorporated into our class. (They don't have to fake who they are.) ~Elizabeth, year 12 Painting student

It's good how we get time after school to do art. It's hard to go from chemistry to art; it's hard to go from one thing to the other. I relax when I do art. I like the long blocks a lot better. I like it better than the singles. I mean I really don't bother to come down on a single because I have to study, but I'll come down on a double, Thursday, Wednesday and after school. ~Aaron, year 12 Painting student

### ***Creative expression.***

The lessons learned from Ms. Wright, in an motivating space with close colleagues and friends, carried beyond the classroom environment. The students shared

that they paid attention to things in new ways and considered art a regular and important part of their lives.

(Do you see the world differently?) Very much so; things, like especially color and light, everything becomes more detailed and you kind of understand the form of the visual thing and a lot more, so you can appreciate more. Well, if I'm driving in the car and I see a landscape, I just think that would be great. You understand how you would paint that. It gives you a new perspective on the world. ~Elizabeth, year 12 Painting student

It's my favorite subject and it's sort of, it's more than just a subject, kind of, it's sort of a hobby the interest we all like to do and do well in. Art becomes a personal thing that we love doing painting, it's yeah. It's like part of yourself. Yes, I think it's more than just a subject or a learning of techniques and things like that. ~Aaron, year 12 Painting student



That's just my little work station at home. And it's where I like to work. I think it's good to have an environment that you want to work in. You just have to set it up in a way that you feel that will work for you. (Did you have a work station prior to art class?) No, I didn't think I needed one, but now that I do art, Mom and Dad are like, "Oh well, we better get you a sewing machine. We better get you this, better get you that." ~Erin, year 12 Textile student

*Figure 28. Work station at home. (Erin)*

I never really used to see art materials like I do now. But now I get excited when I see it. It's inspiring to see some good materials. Before art, I didn't really think about the materials so much, I was like "Oh." ~Erin, year 12 Textile student

Fabric. Just stuff that I saw before that didn't have much value for me, but now that I do textiles, I do feel very much, "What could I do with this?" As opposed to this is just stuff. ~Erin, year 12 Textile student



I discovered an entire new area because of the camera, so that's a section of my backyard I didn't realize I had. ~Elizabeth, year 12 Painting student

*Figure 29. Making new discoveries (Elizabeth)*

We all strive to do good in the subject, like we all like it and we all like to do well. And I think Bunty's influence and the friendly atmosphere makes it so wonderful. *What we're doing in art is important.* ~Aaron, year 12 Painting student

**Ms. Madison**

From my very first contact with Ms. Madison, her wisdom and vigor, as well as her vulnerability, caught my attention. In her response to the creativity question, the first sentence reads as follows: “For me, ytivitaerc is about flexibility even though not all people who are flexible are necessarily creative but if you are not flexible you're less likely to be creative.” She had me hooked with “ytivitaerc” but proceeded to put into words many of the musings and insights presented by experts in the field, such as the worry that “most schools are not set up to encourage true creativity but are about conformity which is the antithesis of creativity.” As I read her responses, I felt that I was right there by here, joining her “stream of consciousness” (as she put it) that was punctuated by her sharing that, “it has been a busy day...creative people spend more of themselves than non-creatives.” This last bit, added to her definition of caring (“Taking yourself and others more seriously than is often thought by non-caring people to be reasonable. I am currently trying to teach myself to care LESS...which, for creative people is a bigger challenge than caring.”), suggested to me that she was telling me about herself, and I needed to listen.

When I was finally to meet Ms. Madison, I held my breath with the anticipation of meeting another fantastic teacher; and I did. She had arranged everything with administration, and I was greeted warmly upon my arrival. They directed me to Ms. Madison’s room where I found her preparing for class. Her melodic voice, soft brown eyes, wavy brown hair, and gentle smile made me feel welcome immediately. She wore relaxed cottony clothes, layered to stay warm from the slight chill in the air. We

immediately fell into conversation about her schedule, interest in the study, and current teaching role at St. Anne's. She told me that she only teaches part-time at the lower school now, although she used to teach full-time at both the lower and upper schools. In that position she taught 900 girls throughout the year and now only teaches 380. The hours and number of girls put a great deal of pressure on her, but the ultimate deciding factor for her to cut down, in part, was a clash with her immediate supervisor in pedagogical and philosophical approaches on how to work with the students. The other part was that being in a negative environment and having no time to recharge, she lost who she wanted to be with the students. On one occasion Ms. Madison said she snapped at a girl in a very uncharacteristic manner; it made her take a step back and reassess what she wanted for herself and the students. The part-time arrangement, surrounded by a principal and colleagues who truly valued her contribution to the school, allowed her to be the teacher she wanted to be and once again feel invigorated by her work. Her responses suggest that Ms. Madison still gives too much of herself, but she now has an ally in her principal, who helps her strive for balance.

### **St. Anne's Academy**

About thirty minutes outside Perth one finds Saint Anne's Academy, a private religious primary through year 12 school for girls. The school is situated on acres of land with a full swimming complex, athletic fields, a new theater arts center, and several other buildings, including dormitories for the boarding students. An ethnically diverse, but economically homogenous group of students attends Saint Anne's. The sound of galas and cockatoos screeches out from the tall, leafy deciduous trees on the property. The

primary and middle schools share a section of the campus, with classrooms surrounding open courtyards housing planters full of tropical flora. I observed students in years 6 and 7. As with Camden, the school did not keep information on student ethnicity. In the classes I observed and from student interviews, several students identified themselves as Asian or Muslim, and the remainder identified either as Western European immigrants or Native Australian, non-Aboriginal. Also in line with the socio-economic status of families at Camden, only a few students were on scholarship or had to make sacrifices to pay tuition.

**Intentions: Thirty unique pieces**

The role of thinking in art production strikes a chord with Ms. Madison just as it does for the other teachers:

I'm very big on you come into art to think, and you should be thinking about what you are doing while you're here...I don't want them to think that art is just, come in and put your head off and you can...do one thing with your hands and another thing with your brain.

She wants her students to use their minds to influence what they do with their hands. To that end, developing a skill base is important but not sufficient, and Ms. Madison sees her role as “trying to connect them to what their ideas are, and [their] personal style and how the style reflects individuality.” For Ms. Madison, embracing individuality relates directly to helping students learn how to think creatively. She tells her students that, “Creativity is about looking at a range of possibilities, and before you look to one of them, consider the various ways and try things, experiment, until you weigh out what's going to work for you.” There's no one right answer, and her intentions are to facilitate a willingness to take risks and explore new ideas. She also supports Vygotsky's idea of the

“zone of proximal development” and sees her role as helping students make their visions real by helping more directly early on and backing away as they gain mastery. She felt comfortable with helping because she had so much original work being produced.

As with the preceding teachers’ intentions, there is a direct relationship between student feelings of success and the final product. She believes that when children are “not taught art properly early on they can be damaged.” Especially harmful is when teachers highlight good “drawers” when what they need to do is to “dispel prejudices and false assumptions about the full spectrum of art; they need to stay open to a variety of ways of producing work.” By setting up a situation in her classroom where students can express themselves in unique ways and reach high expectations, Ms. Madison hopes they will have a sense of accomplishment and appreciation for what they are capable of achieving:

[I] encourage them to do their best work, just practice, practice what they do, take ownership of a project. Sometimes when we structure our projects we’ll have something common to all, but within that, they have choices as to what they do and how to develop. That’s what I’m interested in. I don’t want thirty of the same thing. I want something similar, in that we’ve all had a theme, but I want thirty very different, unique pieces that mirror that student’s interests and what they want to put into the project...It’s important to achieve from the aspect of having [seen] a project through and having an end product, [to] achieve something.

In order to honor uniqueness, Ms. Madison consciously tries to create an environment of respect. She wants a place where students can have “constructive conversations” and space to talk about their work with each other. Treating each other kindly and working collaboratively holds great worth for Ms. Madison, and she works to fashion her classroom environment to support such collaboration. She knows that enabling this creative community, as well as individual efforts, entails allowing students to work in the

art room during lunch or after school and expresses that she does all she can to provide them opportunities to do so.

**A wonderland of inspiration and celebration.**

I don't know exactly what I expected to see when I walked into the classroom, but, based on her responses on the questionnaire, I imagined an over-the-top space, filled with artwork, and efficient systems designed to inspire her students; I saw just that. Bright pink, tall tables popped out immediately, each surrounded by four to six stools topped with purple vinyl cushions. Every possible inch of space displayed completed, as well as ongoing, student projects. Box kites hung from the ceiling, "old" mariners' maps adorned with delicate hand-calligraphy filled the wall behind her desk, and glitter-coated aliens seemed to dance by the main door. Tall bookshelves stood adjacent to the aliens, filled with books, sea shells, a Japanese umbrella, and ceramic porcupine pencil holders made by the girls. Aprons hung on hooks nearby, easily grabbed before sitting down, and reduced the likelihood of dirtying one's uniform. A supply closet sat in back by Ms. Madison's desk which was laden with grade sheets, planning materials, a computer, and other assorted objects. A fascinating found-objects piece made of brightly colored pop bottle lids hung on the wall near the desk. The sound of pre-kindergarten children playing outside filtered into the room. Easels were placed neatly over large windows that frame mature tropical flora and filled the room with light. Each time I entered I noticed more and more, especially when Ms. Madison completely changed the bulletin boards and put up new projects. She was so efficient that unfired platters that the students were just



beginning to decorate with glaze, on my first day, were fired and displayed before I finished my observations.

These platters expanded the boundaries of the classroom because students had depicted memories or unique imaginings based on a school camp trip to Rottnest Island. Quokkas, fish, crabs, sea shells, possums, sunsets, pelicans, and numerous other images from the overnight stood as testament to connecting with nature beyond the classroom walls and drawing upon that experience as an inspiration. Each day I wanted to explore more and more, feeling like I could never soak in all of the objects, tools, and projects that served to inspire and celebrate the creative process. The room was just a rectangular box structurally, but inside it was a wonderland of creativity.

### **Sweet and spicy.**

The students I observed in Ms. Madison's classes were in years 6 and 7, the minimum secondary age I wanted to include in the study. They were at such a different stage developmentally that the observations, photo essays, and interview responses provide an intriguing contrast with the older students about to embark on life outside school. Regardless, they responded with equal affection for the caring and creative environment Ms. Madison fashioned; they simply lacked the sophistication in language and experience to fully capture what it meant for them. Their developmental stage, coupled with the culture of the school, which emphasizes kindness and community, brought about a sweetness which struck me as uplifting. Ms. Madison started each class the same way. She would say, "Good morning girls," (or "Good afternoon"), and the girls would reply in unison, "Good morning Ms. Madison." When she introduced me, the girls

greeted me by name, in unison, as well. They didn't balk at the ritual and in fact embraced it as an invitation to transition to art. I continued to be aware of this sweetness as, more than any other class, the girls continually offered to help each other gather or clean materials, open a jar of glaze, or give their advice on an idea someone had. Some stood, some sat while they worked, feet tapping, voices humming, and heads bopping to some internal song or rhythm. One student sang an entire class period; another student was dancing around, caught me watching her being silly, and gave me a big, almost embarrassed smile. All of the classes were large, with at least 24 students in each. Even at lunch it filled with 26 students who had lobbied incessantly for permission to come work:

Ms. Madison: It's just about pack-up time.

Several FS: Ohhh...(Sad whine)

Several FS: Can we come in at lunch? Please, please, please?

FS: We should have a whole day dedicated to art. (A chorus of yeses replies)

The art room filled with students during Ms. Madison's planning period as well; some worked on art projects, some didn't even have art this quarter but came in to help their friends; still others used materials from the art room to help them complete projects for other classes.

Within the never ending buzz of activity, Ms. Madison maintained calm control over the classroom. She would quietly ask for attention and wait until all eyes were on her. The students gathered around when it was time for a demonstration and then dispersed back into the flow of work, conversation, song, and dance that helped them create. When they came in the room, some would sit down, but many students asked Ms. Madison what needed to be set on the tables, and she would put them to work. They followed the cleaning procedures eagerly, raising their hands when Ms. Madison called

for volunteers, and even initiated clean-up on their own. When they had questions, some students waited quietly, hands raised for Ms. Madison to notice them; most of the time she did and added them to the list of girls asking her to collaborate with them on a creative idea or help them better understand a new skill. Many students simply approached her and waited for her attention to ask their questions; but she was not their only source of information. The girls continually asked each other for help brainstorming on the color of a shell, washing brushes, or holding a tray while they poured a clear glaze over their piece.

The spiciness came out in the students' desire to be unique, to showcase their creativity. One student painted the head of a fish on one corner of her plate and the tail on the other because she didn't want to paint it in the middle; she said, "I want to be different." It also came out in some of their interactions. Another student wanted to work from nature but make it her own; as she said, "I didn't want just a Rottnest flower, but I wanted to make my own." The students wanted to be unique and knew that Ms. Madison valued their efforts to go beyond the first idea that came to mind. The Rottnest platter designs attest to the freedom afforded them to express themselves as unique individuals:

Ashley glazes seahorses on her platter. She looked in a book and the starfish was too simple. She saw the seahorses and liked the idea.

Suzanne chose seagulls because at one of the bakeries "they were chasing me around" and it was a fun memory.

Caroline saw lots of pelicans in "Rotter" and chose to do a pelican. She opens a jar of glaze that is dry and closes that jar and gets another.

Ping glazes the view of the city from a deck, as well as a dolphin in the water and a lighthouse. She's combining different images she observed at different times.

Peggy glazes crabs that she saw during the beach Olympics. There are dots of raised clay as decoration but she made them rocks.

Francine does peacock feathers on the corners of her piece.

Although their conceptual depth was still developing, the students were beginning to find their voice, to value the distinctive way in which they saw the world.

The spiciness also came through in their interactions with each other. At one point one of the girls sitting with a group of four other students at her regular table, got up and moved to a different table. Someone had said something unkind at the first table, and she felt free to remove herself to a safe place. She didn't ask Ms. Madison to intervene, and in fact began singing and continuing her work at the new table. At one point, the girls from the other table asked her to return:

FS: Heather, why don't you come back?

(Heather had switched tables when her friends were joking and she didn't find it funny)

Heather: 'Cause I'm staying here.

FS: FS is the only meanie.

(The girls reminisce about a fight last year.)

FS2: Why'd you get mad last year?

Heather: Because you threw a shoe at us.

(Heather continues working at the new table for a while. Eventually one of her friends comes up and asks her to return, and the "meanie" says she was sorry.)

Ms. Madison patiently observed the interaction, watching to see how they would manage.

She had confidence in their ability to handle controversy, and they did. Not only were the students empowered to manage conflicts as a result of Ms. Madison's expectations and modeling, they also had learned that it was okay to express opinions that differed from their peers and the teacher. For example, two students were talking about art club:

FS1: I'm doing art club tomorrow.

FS2: I feel sorry for you.

FS1: It is kind of fun because we put our stuff together.

(The second student explains that she doesn't like art, but doesn't really dislike it either. She just would rather be doing sports)

Both girls expressed their opinions in a matter of fact, non-judgmental way. The student who disliked art still put a great deal of effort into her projects. Interestingly, having just come to the school this year and not having had a solid art foundation may have contributed to her dislike of art. Her skills lagged behind the other students to a certain degree. I wondered if working with Ms. Madison and improving her skill would undo some of the "damage" resulting from a lack of artistic skill development early on.

They also showed spice when expressing their opinions about a work of art Ms. Madison had brought in to model for how to paint details on a background, as well as to practice thinking conceptually about art. Made by a friend of Ms. Madison's, the sculpture was of a woman with exceptionally large high heeled shoes and a gigantic "butt."

FS: It looks awesome!

FS: It's gross.

To the table of singers, Ms. Madison said: Girls, could we just pop over here...look how small her head is compared to her big bottom.

(The girls are describing contrasting colors and patterns.)

Ms. Madison: Is the artist saying anything?

FS: Big butts aren't bad.

(Several girls talk about angles, shapes, where the artist placed the eyes. They reference caricatures they made last year. A great discussion of body image ensues. After a while, Ms. Madison allows the discussion to ebb and encourages the girls to remember the design and conceptual elements of the piece when doing their work.)

The students were painting terra cotta flower pots to help another teacher with a fundraising project for cancer research. When introducing the project Ms. Madison explained the reason for the pots and opened up a discussion about cancer. A supportive and quiet patience guided the discussion, Ms. Madison encouraging the girls to ask

questions and express their thoughts and feelings. One girl cried gently during the discussion, and Ms. Madison allowed space for her emotions and comforted her. Even at their young ages of 11 and 12, the girls had felt the pain of this pernicious disease; by allowing discussion, comforting the young woman who cried in quiet calm, and processing their insights, Ms. Madison communicated that feelings mattered. She helped them process these emotions and encouraged them to draw upon them when designing their pots. I list a few of their stories here, far short of the number of stories told, to give a sense of the moment:

(A student shares about a family friend who died from cancer last month. Another had a great uncle die. Ms. Madison says to think of colors that represent that person.)

Ms. Madison: Most of us lead such happy lives, we don't think about it.

(Ms. Madison says her mum died three years ago. The happiest memory she has about her mum was when she had cancer. It made her mum more grateful for everything.)

Jackie: My gram had breast cancer in England, went all over her body. Could we do it for someone who died of a heart attack?

Ms. Madison: Commemorate someone. It may even just be for a person who is sad. (She talks about knowing people who can't get over their losses.)

New stories unfolded as the students worked together, sharing them with each other and Ms. Madison. Most continued to delve into their feelings and memories; after a while, the students began singing and chatting, occasionally revisiting their tales as they moved from painting the base to the decorative details.

“Commemorating” someone turned into a serendipitous opportunity to nurture their burgeoning efforts as conceptual artists, as well as their creativity. Ms. Madison informed them that “daisies look boring and done to death” and encouraged them to work “past the first idea,” to “go beyond what you probably did in year two or three.” It also allowed Ms. Madison an opportunity to teach them new painting techniques when

working on a curved three dimensional surface. The remainder of the class time involved ongoing small group instruction, one-on-one brainstorming on how to represent their ideas, and a celebration of unique approaches to a single task. At one point Ms. Madison encouraged the students to “have a bit of a look at everyone’s pot.” They saw pots with elegant designs that symbolized an elegant grandmother; abstract elephant trunks comprised of large swirls to represent a loved one’s passion for elephants; empty picture frames in which someone planned to decoupage on photographs of family members for a grandfather in a nursing home. They celebrated texturing and depth on some of the pots and the unique color combinations on others. This scenario allowed the students to reflect on the sadness of life and respond with reflection and compassion without having to hide their feelings. One student shared that she appreciated the freedom to express this complexity by having a teacher who allows them to be unique. She shared her belief that teachers should “Always give them more than one thing to do; give them a choice, not just, ‘You have to do this.’” Ms. Madison did just that.

**Student perceptions: Appreciating self and the world.**

The students expressed that they loved the opportunity to take photographs showing how art influenced their self-perceptions and the way in which they interacted with the world around them. They felt that Ms. Madison had given them tools that helped them look at things differently, which in turn influenced their families to see them as competent, creative people, further shaping their identities through art. Being asked to share what they thought about art and their experiences with Ms. Madison felt empowering as well and helped them more explicitly reflect on the significance of their

experiences. Their thoughts reflect their developmental stage but still highlight the importance of holistic and positive self-concept development.

*Comfort, creativity, and collegiality.*

The art room is a space where the students felt comfortable; comfortable to talk with each other, to move around, and to get messy. Being surrounded by Ms. Madison's artwork and that of their peers refreshed their own thinking, inspiring them to go past their first idea. Their relationships with each other supported creative expression and made it enjoyable for them when they are there.

[In the art room] you see ideas; say you had an idea first then you can change things and make a "wow" picture. ~Tina

We talk and walk around. Not being quiet, it's good because you really get to know other people. (Is it important to know the other girls?) Yeah, it's like sometimes I want to be different, and I know what they like (so I can do my own thing). ~Sasha

Well, everyone's got people that they usually sit with, but everyone really likes each other, though they usually sit with the same people. Sometimes the tables get mixed up because there would be friends at different tables. But, yeah, everyone's nice to everyone else. They share things, if someone needs some paint, they'll pour it out for them or something like that. And they won't just take it for themselves and stuff like that. ~Haley

Everyone likes each other in this class, and we all just get along really well. You see everyone talking to each other and helping each other. We always get to talk with each other. Sometimes we ask our friends, "Do you like that? Should I change it?" ~Patty

In art, it doesn't matter if you get messy; you've got aprons and stuff on. Some teachers don't really like you getting messy, but in art you can get a bit messy, you can talk, and you can know move around a lot, and you don't just stay sitting down. Some people are standing up, some people are kneeling on their chair; you can go like that instead of just sitting down straight. So you can do lots of different things and Ms. Madison will usually help you with that, and that's pretty good. ~Haley



Sometimes the room inspires us; we'll look at the paintings on the wall that she's done, and it might give us some good ideas. We've got all these shells that we can pick up and touch, and a lot of other things. (What's it like to be able to touch?) Um, it gives us the feeling of textures, doesn't it, like, if we're working with clay, like, I've got a piece of coal; for my platter I put it against my clay and it made a nice pictures, so, you can always experiment with them. ~Patty

You get to look at lots of other people's different art, and there're some interesting things up there. So, while you're washing paintbrushes you can have a look at what some other classes have been doing. And it's really bright, and it feels good to be in here. ~Haley

Well we get to try lots of different things, not really just the same things. You wouldn't really be learning very many creative things if you were just doing the same thing over and over again, and you might get a bit bored. But, if you're doing the different things then you wouldn't get bored. You'd be doing like different things and you'd always have like different goals and stuff like that. ~Haley

(Tina talks about a picture made with recycled bottle caps.) I always see that in the art room and, I'm always looking at it, so it's just inspiring for me, that you can make things, normal things into a piece of art. ~Tina

You learn lots of stuff. Whereas maybe in a different class you're not allowed to talk to anyone, you're not learning very much because you're not talking at all. Because you're sharing with other people, you're learning from their ideas as well as your own. You can change things quite a bit and stuff like that. You get to look at lots of different paintings sometimes, and she'll hold up some paintings and you can learn about different artists. And we also learn calligraphy and stuff, so yeah that's quite cool. ~Haley

I like coming in at lunch; it feels good 'cause I can keep working on my art project. I can take more time doing art, because art's my favorite subject. ~Tina

***Ms. Madison.***

When I observed the classes, Ms. Madison moved from student to student, helping them process their ideas and taking them to the next level; this approach was seen as tremendously helpful and inspiring by the students. They also appreciated the fact that she spoke to them kindly and didn't yell. Interacting with students in a kind manner seems like common sense, but too often teachers do yell, putting up a barrier to learning.

Ms. Madison modeled that her students were worthy of being treated with dignity and they appreciated her kindness. She expected them to be kind to each other and the students welcomed how she set a tone of mutual respect. They also appreciated her creativity and felt inspired by her artwork and the way in which she expanded their own creativity. Her modeling and feedback introduced them to ways of thinking that transcended the classroom.

Ms. Madison teaches us how to do certain things and that's really helpful. She doesn't do all our work. Cause kids don't like how the teacher's doing all their work...they don't get to accomplish anything. ~Tina

She's really nice and she helps us. She never really yells or anything. She doesn't tell you what to do; she doesn't tell us exactly what we're going to make. She'll give us an idea and we can take it if we want to. ~Sasha

Ms. Madison helps everyone out. She gives us a lot of good ideas. Sometimes she lets us do what we want, um she gives us kind of like good ideas that we can use. She doesn't mind if we if we like different colors and are ourselves. ~Patty

She's nice, she doesn't yell. At my old school, the other teacher would always yell. It makes you more peaceful and relaxed so you can think what to do. Otherwise you might be pressing hard on your pen if you're angry or you won't be drawing what you really want. ~Tina

She doesn't like people who aren't nice to each other and who are getting paint on each other and stuff like that. So she doesn't like that, and she might have them come in at lunch time to maybe clean some tables if they've been acting not the way should be during class. So she does care about other people's feelings during the class and makes sure they all feel good. ~Haley

She tells us something can be better...She gives a suggestion on how to make it better, without saying, "It's not good enough, that's bad." ~Tina

She's really nice, like, if someone asks a question she'll always answer them, and everything. And she'll usually do a demonstration, which is good because then usually everyone can watch and then it will answer that question if they might have been thinking about that. If you want to know something, she'll always tell you. ~Haley

She's really creative; I can tell. She's sometimes given me examples; she likes sketching, she just does it really quick and really good. And I can just tell, even just in her writing, it's like really arty, when you see it. She's able to help us with our artwork; if you don't have a creative art teacher then, they won't give you any ideas. I saw her at the beach and she was taking photos of the ocean, so she's still really artistic outside of school. She has a studio in her house to do artwork; I think she's pretty artsy. ~Patty

Well, she lets us use our own art style on our art. Some teachers try and make you look all the same so things, like "costume" drawing, or a stitch... Yeah, you learn more. [The teacher says that nothing is a mistake] you can make it better. ~Tina

She doesn't really encourage rubbing out lots of stuff. She likes you to just change it a bit; it's not always that bad, that you can just change it a bit. Yeah, so that's quite good. It's not a mistake. ~Haley

Ms. Madison taught us that sometimes the first thing that pops into your head isn't the best idea. Like if you keep thinking you can get really good ideas. ~Patty

She'll let you do your own thing, but then she'll always give you ideas that everyone in the class can use. We all chat and laugh and do all that, but as long as you're kind of working that's okay. We can talk. ~Haley

She takes the time, and if you don't know, if you go to her she'll help you. And she just is always helping. ~Sasha

She makes simple things into art. (She does a lot with recycled materials.) Like, bottle tops, like that picture, it's like bottle tops with painting in the background. Her work is inspiring. She really helps me with ideas, to get more ideas. She'll say you can do something like this and then you actually change the idea a bit and you have your own idea. ~Tina

She's always really nice, and she'll think of you, and she'll always ask what you're doing and if she can help you. Maybe she'll give you a suggestion on how you can improve what you're doing, or change some things that you're doing. At the end usually she'll put everything out and everyone chooses one they really like, and then she'll have the class tell why they like it, so that's quite nice as well. Then everyone gets a say; so if someone likes it, they can hear why someone likes it and stuff like that. People can learn ideas from things like that. You feel happy that someone thinks that yours was really good, so that's nice. (When not chosen?) Someone's going to be chosen next time. You can see why they chose it because they're always like really creative, and they're a bit like different and stuff. ~Haley

*Seeing the world in detail.*

The photo essays reveal that their training in art helps the students notice the little details around them, such as a pattern in the flooring, the way flowers cluster, or the shine of a dog's coat. It also gives them a sense of worth, an appreciation for what they can do and what makes them special.

Art makes me feel like a special person. I think the art class helped with that. At my old school we didn't have a real art teacher (She's been at St. Anne's one year). Now, I take my camera; I make sure and take it around and take more arty pictures than usual. ~Tina

(She says it's her favorite and I ask her why) I don't know; it's just, you can be different, yeah, like I made a "burnt" cupcake out of fabric instead of a normal one. ~Sasha

I remember when we were doing our drawings for our Rottneest plate, the girls were helping me draw them, like showing me how to draw certain animals because I couldn't draw them. And, um, they were showing the best shapes to draw for a quokka. It felt good. ~Tina

(What do your parents think about your art?)

They're really proud of it. The fish one, the fish painting is hanging up on the wall.

(How does that make you feel?)

It makes me feel like I've done all that work for something, not just nothing.

(Anything else?)

Just thank you for giving me this opportunity. I really want to be a photographer when I grow up. ~Patty



I wanted it to be different, not the same as most other pictures. (Is that something you learned to do from Ms. Madison, to do things differently?) Yeah. Apparently someone saw a photo like that and it cost about a thousand something dollars. (She took a photo hanging in her home of a picture of the Eiffel Tower she took on a trip to France.) ~Sasha

*Figure 30. Underbelly of the Eiffel Tower (Sasha)*



*Figure 31. Texture of a tree (Haley)*

I've got a few of texture and patterns because that's what we do a lot of in class, look at different textures, and sometimes we add different things to paint and it builds the texture in it, so maybe you'd paint it on really thickly and layer it on and stuff like that, so that's quite fun as well.  
~Haley



*Figure 32. The beauty of the beach (Patty)*

That was at the beach and that's the wall. I just like taking photos of the beach, and I like doing it in black and white. With Ms. Madison, we went to the beach once, for an excursion, and she taught me there. The beach is really beautiful. ~Patty

That's in my sketchbook, and that's my dad on the couch. (Would you have ever sat down and sketched your dad before?) No. (Laughs) ~Patty (The image did not come through clearly enough to include, but the reference to interacting with her father through her artwork was important to note.)



*Figure 33. Raindrops (Tina)*

This was actually yesterday afternoon; it was raining, I was looking out the window and I took a picture of the rain drops, and you can see the school from the car park. (She shared that she never would have noticed this detail prior to working with Ms. Madison.) ~Tina

I found out that everyday objects can be art, if you put, if you look at them from a different perspective. I like making everyday objects more arty, and making them funny. ~Tina (The image was too blurry, but she had put a swim cap with leaves as horns on top of a photo of a pop music star she liked.)



These have lots of flowers in it. At the beginning of the year we did some paintings of flowers and we entered them in competition. And on the first lesson we had to draw some flowers and we'd get to draw them, sketch them and then we put them on tracing paper and we did lots of painting around them and stuff like that, so that was very fun, what we did there. That was in term one. Yeah you mixed your own flowers and we put the flowers up in the art room, so that was nice. ~Haley

*Figure 34. Flowers (Haley)*

**Ms. Meyers**

Ms. Meyers keeps herself busy at the state level helping write visual arts curriculum among other tasks. This involvement led her to contact me in regards to the study. She said that she believed supporting this type of work matters and helps educators improve the quality of what they do with students. I immediately noticed that Ms. Meyers had a more controlled style as compared to the other teachers with whom I'd been working. Her emails were more formal and specific as to details, revealing very little about her personality. However, I still got a sense of warmth through the formality and drew upon those hints when determining if Ms. Meyers would be a good fit for the study. Her questionnaire responses matched what I had felt in the emails. The Likert scale responses exuded caring and commitment to her students; the short answer replies communicated a value for caring and creativity, but were more reserved. Ms. Meyers wrote that creativity was, "the result of a conscious or unconscious act which invokes a response or purpose," a reply that intrigued me to see how that played out in the classroom. On caring, she replied that it was "nurturing and supporting the needs of others." Her choice of words, "nurturing" and "support" caught my interest, especially when coupled with her Likert selections, and we made arrangements for Ms. Meyers to participate in the study. It's important to note here that the timing of the visit was not ideal. The week before winter holiday was the only time our schedules overlapped, a factor influencing student energy and excitement. Also, she had a practicum (student) teacher who taught the more advanced classes with whom Ms. Meyers had worked longer

and built stronger relationships. I kept all of these factors in mind when observing the classes.

When I finally met Ms. Meyers, I found that the caring yet controlled manner of her emails depicted her well. She welcomed me with a soft, monitored voice, carefully selecting words to convey her ideas. Her clothes and hairstyle reflected an attention to fashion and presenting herself in a businesslike manner. Before taking a tour, we met with the principal who welcomed me warmly and talked about the school's founding and ongoing commitment to the arts. Ms. Meyers blushed slightly when the principal spoke of her work with the students in glowing terms, giving me a bit of a glimpse beneath the professional exterior. This glimpse expanded further when we toured the halls on the way to her office and classroom. We visited the library where she had current student work displayed. She beamed with pride at the graffiti art foot stools they had made, as well as studies of skulls in charcoal; she was right to feel pride at these efforts. She also glowed when showing me and talking about the framed artwork of past students hanging prominently in the main hallways and arts corridor. When introducing me to and talking with her colleagues in the arts department (which included all of the arts, not just visual arts), her energy and commitment shone through as well. An image of a yin/yang symbol popped into my mind, and I wondered how this genuine but controlled caring would manifest itself in the classroom.

### **Madison Senior College**

Madison Senior College sits in the suburbs about forty minutes outside of Perth, within earshot of the sound of waves pounding on the shore. Middle to upper middle



income homes immediately surround the school. Madison is a senior college, meaning it only serves students in years 11 and 12. Unlike other public schools in the area, students have to apply and be accepted to attend. Madison is a large two-story building with broad windows and wide open hallways and commons areas. Vast green athletic fields surround the building, palm trees line wide walkways, and commissioned sculptures adorn the exterior walls and courtyards of the school. The school provides programs for both students on the Tertiary Entrance Examination (TEE) (university) or Training and Further Education (TAFE) tracks. The visual and performing arts programs have been a priority at the school since its inception five years prior. The only available statistic on ethnicity was that .003% of the students at Madison are Aboriginal. According to Ms. Meyers, a large percentage of the students are from migrant immigrant families, mostly from the United Kingdom and a smaller number from South Africa. She only has one student in all of her classes whose first language is not English. Ms. Meyers also notes that many students live out of their homes, either with friends or on their own after their families kicked them out due to pregnancy or criminal problems. Socioeconomic, immigration, and other social stressors contribute to these problems; the significance for the study is that the students endured real-life challenges that impacted them as individuals and as students.

### **Intentions: Strengthening the individual**

For Ms. Meyers, meaning comes more from the overall art class experience. She does not articulate specific intentions to help students think introspectively but does

express a desire for them to be who they are. She believes that by engaging students artistically she can honor and help them express their unique personalities and styles:

People are a tapestry. If they have a few extra colors and a few extra parts to their fiber, it's who they are. I did a piece of work [about the] fibers of life and it was a piece of work that was painted in layers, sort of interwoven. And when I was doing that piece of work I thought, "Well, really, that's what people are like. How we sort of weave in and out of one another's lives in what we do." It sort of makes up who that individual is. So, when they come into the room, you know, it is a nice working environment. I'm serious about my job, but I'm also serious about my students as individuals.

While she honors who they are, Ms. Meyers also wants to guide students to try different things and push themselves creatively. She views creativity as a process consisting of evolving ideas and products and sees her role as embracing and guiding this process:

Encouraging students not to just settle for the first idea that pops into their head. We do a lot of, like, gathering ideas and drawings and then some thumbnails. And then, if it changes, it doesn't bother me. If it looks different in the portfolio to what the finished product is, that doesn't matter. But what matters is that they are willing to explore and use different materials and media and get somewhere.

This intention reoccurs in the interview and an examination of her lessons. At some points Ms. Meyers focuses on the process, other times she focuses on the product and how each phase of making a work of art should inform later phases. As with the other teachers this notion of having a concrete product to affirm the creative process is indispensable:

I would be happy for them to come to the classroom and at the end of it leave as individuals that are able to cope with expectations, some pressure, able to cope with being given a task, to see something to completion, to feel good about what they've done. These are goals that I, selfishly, have as a teacher, but I would be just absolutely thrilled if the kids at the end of it came through experiencing those goals.

To ensure that students persist through challenges and realize their potential, Ms. Meyers wants to effect a warm and inviting setting where students can "chat" in a way that "their

manner towards one another is respectful, even when they are speaking of students that are not in the room...To have a nice kind of friendly, working, supportive environment is really important.”

### **A study in contradictions.**

Sunlight streamed in double-story windows that went from Ms. Meyers room to the open classroom above. Outside, an open courtyard with a large rubber plant in one corner and work space on the opposite side provided a welcoming view. By one of the windows stood a white manikin adorned with a red cap and red feathered boa, one arm raised as if to say hello. Bulletin boards lined most of the wall space, filled with colorful posters on the principles of art and design, work of famous artists, and work done by previous students. A large white board covered the front of the room, with one computer on the far left of the counter below the white board. To the right of the main door, which locked automatically, Ms. Meyers’ desk sat in front of shelving topped with figures dancing, hands clasping, and flowers resting in a vase, among other objects for still life work. Five tables, arranged like stripes on a referee’s shirt, filled the center of the room, students sitting on chairs around the tables while they worked. At the far end of the main section of the room, just past the final table, gray shelves held books and other assorted objects, some of it the work of former students. The main supply area stood just around the corner from the shelves, and housed shelving for student work as well and an assortment of materials. All of these components felt warm and inviting. I could envision students walking around, looking at the different posters, talking gaily, and taking a break once in a while to stand outside in the courtyard.

In a more formal manner, Ms. Meyers had written the goals for the day on the white board in the front of the room:

Today's Academic Goal (Blue marker)

To complete notes on 3 sculptors (Green marker)

Today's Social Goal (Blue marker)

To contribute in a meaningful way to the conversations

Take turns equally

Thank group members (All in green marker)

As the students came in and sat down, she went over the goals with them while they half listened. When she reviewed the research project and group method they were using for it, they paid more attention and asked questions before getting started. Some of the students groaned at having to work with people not at their preferred table, but they got up, gathered their research materials and set to work. They were researching three artists, two Australian, who incorporated skulls in some way in their artwork. The lesson was a continuation of skull studies they had done. The aim was to have the students divide up into expert groups on each artist; after researching the artist they would return to their original group and share the information. Some students worked with their new group mates to select which information to write down; most worked independently. At one point Ms. Meyers said, "I didn't hear a lot of conversation going on, so I thought I'd end the torture, and you could go back to your home group" When they got back into their home groups to share, Ms. Meyers asked them to read the information aloud, "like a bedtime story," at which they whined and proceeded to just grab each other's sheets and copy down the information. Ms. Meyers did have music playing on a popular radio station while they worked, but several students preferred listening to their MP3 players. After getting the students started with their research, Ms. Meyers met one-on-one to

review progress on portfolios, getting up from her desk to walk around and talk with the students after every few conferences. One time when she walked around, Ms. Meyers noticed a student using her cell phone and asked, “Sue, put your phone away please.” I saw Sue take it out several times later during class, and she texted while either hiding the phone underneath the table or behind a notebook. Another episode of hidden disrespect occurred when a young man mumbled under his breath, “You’re a terrible teacher; we don’t want to learn” after she asked his table to take their notes.

One table of young men struggled to stay on task. Jonathon, the “ringleader” of the group, kept drawing graffiti tags on his paper instead of researching. The practicum teacher admonished him a few times. He said that this is “stupid” and he “hates art.” Ms. Meyers came over to talk with him, and he settled down a bit, but there was a palpable tension between them. Most of the other students ignored him and continued working. Other than this table the class was almost completely silent, except for the whisperings of students talking about the artists. The next period, students went through the same method but seemed a little more bonded to each other and talked a little bit more. An independent study student who was working on her TAFE level II certification came in during this hour and livened up the discussion at her table. The research project at hand may have influenced the reduced bustle and energy I’d expected to see. Ms. Meyers did work her way around the room and talked with students, checking in on their work, asking them how school was going. She was particularly supportive and effusive with Kim, the independent study student who was also her “adopted” senior and a student she

had had for two years now. Two years...it struck me that the most time Ms. Meyers would have with any of these students would be two years.

The next couple of days the class felt brighter, and not only from the sun streaming in the windows. Ms. Meyers had arranged for Jonathon to work in the library as a study hall to catch up on his other classes because he was so miserable during art class. She could not accept that he had a right to “fail” her class; she wanted better for him and worked to ensure that he had a chance to find success. He begrudgingly, but genuinely, appreciated her efforts. Also, the students began to take their notes and put them in their portfolios and their creativity began to shine. Students didn’t just paste in their notes; they took their time making decorative letters, printing images of the artwork off the internet, and writing in all sorts of varied directions as they crafted the pages they would put in their portfolio. Although the movement and conversation were still quite controlled and limited, it felt as if the class exploded with positive energy compared to the previous day. Students joked with each other and talked about movies, fried Snicker’s bars, birthday parties, goofy parents, and their art. Another phone situation happened today. Two students were texting when Ms. Meyers got up from her desk where she and the practicum teacher had been talking and inputting grades. One student quickly hid her phone, took up a pencil, and pretended to work. Ms. Meyers did not see her and said nothing. The other student got “caught” and Ms. Meyers asked her to put away her phone. As with yesterday, both continued to use their phones covertly during the class, quite successfully at that.

Ms. Meyers invited me to the art department tea over break that day; they always have a big tea before the winter holiday. With her peers, Ms. Meyers showed more of her warmth, but still held back compared to some of her colleagues. What struck me was how important the teachers are as a support system for each other. They talked about students, holiday plans, and listened attentively to their colleagues. I wondered if Ms. Meyers perhaps created this sense of collegiality more with her upper level classes with whom she'd had more time and perhaps felt more comfortable letting in to know her.

**Student perceptions: Getting out what you put in.**

Having such a short time to observe Ms. Meyers classes, the student interviews took on special significance. The wisdom and insights of the students who had worked with her for over half a year would provide critical information to help me make sense of the contradictions that presented themselves. As it turns out, they appreciate her, especially Kim who had known her the longest and in a more personal way. They perhaps did not know her or her them as well as some of the students in the other schools knew their teachers, but she had connected with them and made a difference in their lives.

***Tight knit groups.***

Within the more controlled environment Ms. Meyers preferred, students still felt free to talk and work with their tablemates in a supportive and creative way. They also felt freer in art than in their other classes to move around and communicate with their peers. They trusted and appreciated these relationships which informed their work and growth. They didn't have the opportunity to hang out with these peers in the art room much beyond their regular class time, other than extra time made available on

Wednesdays for students to go to any classroom they chose; however, they were able to build connections to each other during the class time allotted. The space itself, the aesthetic environment, also felt freer than other classes and the students appreciated the light and warmth of the setting.

The people at your table, you get to know them; you can bounce ideas off them and stuff like that. Everyone is just friends at each table, and they just get on with their table. ~Logan, TAFE student

Art class should just be fun 'cause you don't want to block trying to get out your ideas while you're in there, to express yourself. ~Kegan, TAFE student

Everyone's very creative, and it's easy to talk about art, it's not boring. In other classes I find I'm quite bored; here there's always something new. It's not the same, boring topics, it's all different. It won't be just painting; there'll be sculptures or lino-print, or all different kinds of techniques. ~Kim, Certification II student

We can sit anywhere we want. It's better than having to sit with someone you don't get along with or you don't talk to that much. ~Kegan, TAFE student

You can express your own ideas, use your own interests, and stuff like that. You don't have to do what everyone else is doing. ~Logan, TAFE student

We all get along really well; we're all individual and we help each other also. When we're in a group, we all get together and share our ideas and that helps our individual work. ~Kim, TAFE student

Well, everyone respects what we're doing. And people will just walk around to help you out; no one's rude to anyone, that's good. It helps we don't really talk much. ~Kegan, TAFE student

On the Wednesday we get off, we can come in if we want, and complete some work. And even on exam break, every Tuesday she has the art room open so everyone can catch up. ~Kegan, TAFE student

We sit in different places because we have different people we like to work with; but it depends on who we get along with. Some people like to talk and some people just like to concentrate. Some students just go off on their own. There's usually some of the people that are loud and you lose your concentration. She addresses it every time, but those people are still there. Some of them do talk, but



the group at the front. They just don't concentrate as well and are just doing their own thing. ~Brenda, TAFE student

I think people are more sociable in there 'cause everyone wants to be there, and they're there for a reason; and you all have something in common 'cause you're doing the art. ~Kegan, TAFE student

We can just kind of space out sometimes and just do the work and feel comfortable, it's so relaxing. ~Brenda, TAFE student

The other classes are a lot like you sit down and do your work. This one you can talk a lot more; you can get up move around. In the others, if everyone's doing the same work you're going to get the same answer; with art, it's sort of everyone's got their own thing to do. ~Logan, TAFE student

I think the classroom does actually help; how this classroom is arranged is comfortable. It gives you a lot of space. I like the high ceiling and the light from the windows 'cause you feel more confined in other classes. It gives you more breathing or something. Fresh air frees your mind. ~Brenda, TAFE student

***Ms. Meyers.***

All of the students appreciate Ms. Meyers; at the same time, their responses suggest that they feel a bit of her distance as well. Brenda's first answer sums up this dichotomy more exactly than the words I struggled to find. Ms. Meyers makes a difference but stops just short of letting herself go that extra step. She seemed to have done so with Kim, and the resulting difference, as shown in her responses, is profound. The students also appreciated her ability to give them ideas and guidance but not dominate or dictate their work. They felt free to be creative and express their ideas through their work.

She does care. It's not overly affectionate, like a mum, but she's a kind teacher; not the one, the favorite teacher. But she will give you help and stuff. She's a good teacher. Compared to some she's less affectionate and more helpy. You get some good teachers that you talk with more and create more of a friendship with. And Ms. Meyers won't display as much feeling, but she will also provide the knowledge. She's affectionate but without showing it. ~Brenda, TAFE student

She's really friendly and outgoing. She gets along with you...you can talk with her about anything. She's passionate. ~Kim, Certification II student

Really qualified; she likes to talk about art work a lot, like every week we bring up our files and show her all that we've drawn. And she helps us on things that we can improve. I'm quite close to Ms. Meyers because I've been in her class for two years now, and I'm leaving so I don't know, like I got really close to Ms. Meyers. She's a really nice teacher, she helps you a lot. ~Kim, Certification II student

When we do our projects, beforehand, she would do it herself, to show us how to do it. Otherwise we'd sit around the table and she shows us what she wants us to do. And she's really good with what she works with, and we get an idea when we watch her. You can actually see the drawing, and it can influence you, like all the shading that she does. You're looking at it step-by-step, and you're able to understand what it would look like. ~Kegan, TAFE student

She just shows a lot of caring; like, she shows that she cares about what you do and how much effort you put in because she shows a lot of effort so that makes you want to put more effort into it. And then she kind of pushes you to do better art, which is really good, and that does help a lot. And then she gives you feedback on how you're doing and that shows that she cares a lot about what you do, how you can achieve. ~Kim Certification II student

She's not overbearing. It seems like she doesn't just breathe down you; she sort of lets you take your own idea and do it, as long as it meets the criteria I guess. You use your own idea. That's good; it's like they're all into their own individual work, it's not all the same. ~Logan, TAFE student

She offers her help and opinions and stuff. And, she's very supportive of our being creative. She does tend to help with the total work, with techniques and stuff. There're some of us that don't like to shade, but it does look better; after all, we do need to get the technique right. ~Brenda, TAFE student

She's pretty supportive. If she's doing something, she'll either help or say that's good. She'll just give like ideas. She'll give an idea, a choice; you could do this or if you do that, just try it. If you don't have any ideas, it's just good to know that there's somebody there who knows what they're doing so they can give you an idea. ~Logan, TAFE student

She's more outgoing, I suppose, like when she's describing something she puts more effort into it, and then shows that she loves that project, and then we show that we love that. When she puts effort into showing her work of art, it shows that she put in effort and then we want to put effort into it. It shows that she cares about it. ~Kim, Certification II student

She can be nice and then she can be a bit, uh, she always treats us a bit, too like, as if you're younger. Sometimes she'll be okay, but then sometimes she can go straight to you, and it makes you feel younger. Just the way she talks, it just sort of sounds like pretty childish, in a condescending way; it's nothing major. Logan, TAFE student

She's very good at art and then she's good at teaching as well. She listens and she works her way around the room to every student she helps, with each piece of work. And if they ask for help she'll come to them straight away, she'll be everywhere. ~Brenda, TAFE student

I think she tries, but what she thinks will be fun it's not always fun. I don't think it bothers people too much. It's not as good as it could be, but it's not so bad that we can't stand it. ~Logan, TAFE student

Well she cares...she doesn't give us too much instruction, so it won't stop the creativity, but she still provide the guidelines. She'll come around with her opinion on something, but she won't tell us to do it exactly how she wants it to look. She will say oh if you want to take it this way or this way, she'll give us option. ~Brenda, TAFE student

### ***Creative lives.***

The students didn't express that their work with Ms. Meyers had significantly informed their artistic lives. Most of them had been in her class less than one year, so they hadn't had time to establish close relationships or had her influence rub off as much artistically. Mostly, their existing passion for art led them to choose to take art with Ms. Meyers. Regardless, art played a significant role in their lives and helped them appreciate the world around them, and the people in their lives appreciated what they had to offer.

I really like it, because mum always gives me comments on every time I do artwork, and she'll really likes seeing them. So she inspires me to do more. (Is that true for your dad as well?) Yeah, he used to do drawing too, and that's what I think got me started in the first place. ~Kegan, TAFE student



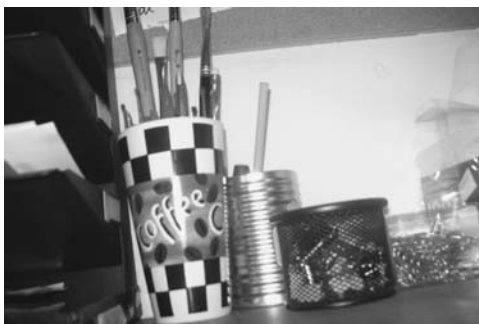
And that's the piece that we have outside (of the school). We had to draw, to paint this last year, and so it was hard to paint because you had to do with the rings combined, like they're tangled. But it's really cool, the way they have done it, and it has a meaning as well. It's the twists and turns of your life and that's school and then it's cut off and it's like now it's your turn. ~Brenda, TAFE student

*Figure 35. Pathways sculpture (Brenda)*



This is actually in the art room, and I just love this, every single time I go in the art room that just straight away catches my attention 'cause of all of the different colors and the attention to detail really. ~Kim, Certification II student

*Figure 35. Inspirational figures in the art room (Kim)*



Every time I go home, I always draw because I want to ready my skills for TAFE. I'm going to apply at the end of the year. ~Kegan, TAFE student

*Figure 36. Art work space at home (Kegan)*



My dad showed me that, and I just wanted to draw it because it had lots of detail in it. I just usually get a photo off of the internet and I just look at it and draw. (Any relation at all between art and his outside work?) I don't think anything in art has helped it; I'm sure if I hadn't done art, I'm not sure if I would have developed the skills, but I'm not sure that it helped at all. ~Logan, TAFE student

*Figure 37. Japanese warrior (Logan)*



I liked that; this reminds me of art because of all the different art things that you use, like the paint and stuff, and like all the different types of paper you use, and the glue. And, I think of the things that you can use to decorate your page. It looks better in black and white; it gave it a more vintage theme. ~Kim, Certification II student

*Figure 39. Oil pastels (Kim)*

## **Chapter Five: Discussion of Themes and Responses to Research Questions**

The assumption guiding my research is that as a society we should want and strive to have educational systems that develop happy, healthy, joyful, productive people who can empathize with and help others. We should want people who can flourish creatively and contribute to the world, whether artistically or otherwise; who can solve problems in order to make the world a better place to live. As you read in the literature review, I base my assumption on research and scholarly reflection on creativity, caring, diversity, and holistic development, not just within education but within a broader social context including the arenas of business and civic responsibility. The educational environments in which students learn will determine whether or not they evolve openly and creatively, and we must recognize that these environments are critical, for “every time a teacher plans a curriculum activity, events are planned that have an impact on students’ thought processes...[and] affect what students are likely to think about” (Eisner, 2002, p. 151). They need to be encouraged to think imaginatively and to open themselves to multiple ways of being. Maxine Greene (1995) captures this essence eloquently when she writes:

One of teachers’ shared interests ought to be in finding alternatives to templates and schemata that overwhelm primordial landscapes. Another ought to be in creating a civilization that can tolerate the potency of desire, the thrust of diverse energies, the vitality of play, and the intention to transform. (p. 52)

Sameness and flatness of perspective rob students of their humanity, and ultimately humanity of itself.

I examined if the visual arts teachers participating in the study aimed for humanistic learning, how they went about it, and if in fact students benefitted creatively and personally as a result. Are the students creative and caring people who can and want to make a difference? In answering question one, I will show that teachers did aim to shape students in this way. Examination of question two will show how they achieved their aims through the caring and creative environments they fashioned. In all of the classrooms (whether American or Australian; urban, rural, or suburban; private or public; affluent or low income) the more genuine the care and the more effectively caring practices were implemented, the greater the ability of the teachers to help students engage in behaviors essential for creative thinking and art production. As a result, students exhibited an eagerness and desire to take creative risks (see Question Three) and viewed themselves positively (see Question Four). All of these components together helped students develop into holistic, creative thinkers. In addition to looking at the bigger picture, this type of instruction provides a model for addressing the immediate need to keep students in school as motivated, challenged, and successful learners (Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2009). Understanding the impact of these visual arts teachers and the environments they create on their students will help schools follow Eisner's (2002) recommendation to "examine the character of excellent arts teaching as a way of finding approaches to the teaching of other fields that would be genuinely educational" (p. 236).

#### **Question One: Teachers' Intentions**

My first research question is: *What are the intentions of visual arts teachers who state that they believe caring and creative environments are essential for arts instruction*

*and students' holistic development?* The purpose of this question was to be able to determine if their intentions addressed or reflected critical components of care and creativity theories.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the teachers participating in the study all identified themselves as educators who value and purposefully work to develop creative and caring visual arts environments in order to enhance students' holistic development. In answering the question, three distinct parts are addressed. First of all, do the teachers' intentions reflect their beliefs that creative environments are essential for arts instruction and students' holistic development? Secondly, since they identify caring as essential, are caring elements found in their intentions? Thirdly, do their intentions reflect the concept of holistic development for their students, and if so, how?

### **Intertwining Creative, Caring, and Holistic Intentions**

The teachers in the study all expressed the following general categories of intentions, the combination of which reflects an intertwining of creative, caring, and holistic ideals. The teachers believed that what the students do in art class should have meaning, and they aimed for their students to develop as conceptual thinkers. This thinking reflects best practices for engaging students in active versus passive learning and giving students greater control over their classroom environment and learning (Shernoff et al., 2003). Furthermore, they deemed it essential to help students develop their voices through self discovery in order make the most of their potential. These beliefs reflect Dewey's (1909) holistic concept that by attending to students as an "organic whole" (p. 9), they can learn about themselves, not just skills or content. They also tie directly to



Noddings' (1992) notion in regard to care for self that, "In helping to preserve our children's lives and physical well-being, we must start them on the road to reflection for self-understanding" (p. 89). This type of understanding must also embrace students' cultural backgrounds. Teachers trusted that honoring student voices and ways of thinking validated and empowered the students, an important feature of care theory for culturally diverse learners (Ellsworth, 1989; Gay, 2000; Salazar, 2006). Maxine Greene (1995) cautions that, "No matter what our personal inclinations, teachers especially can no longer obliterate the diverse voices, unashamed of their distinctiveness, speaking life stories and cultural stories sometimes at odds with or contemptuous of the sacred writs of mainstream life" (p. 170). The teachers believed in the power of students' stories and felt that by discovering their own voices and exploring who they are students develop skills necessary to thrive as individuals.

Creativity ties in with these intentions as well. The teachers believed that students would grow creatively if allowed to connect their learning to what matters to them and gives their lives meaning. They said that helping students find their voice nurtures their passion for exploration and maximizes the person-environment fit and love for what they do, reflecting Eisner's (2002) conviction that "what we enjoy most we linger over...Children, like the rest of us, seldom voluntarily pursue activities for which they receive little or no satisfaction" (p. xiii). The teachers believed, and research supports their viewpoint, that if students engaged with concepts, projects, and materials in ways that are meaningful to them, it spurs them to want to know more and enhances creative thought and production (Sawyer, 2003; Sternberg, 2003). They felt that looking at the

world through an artistic lens is a vital part of this process of self discovery as well, another idea supported in the literature (Saunders, 1968). Students are permitted, in fact encouraged to “direct [their] attention inward to what [they] believe or feel. Such a disposition is at the root of the development of individual autonomy” (Eisner, 2002, p. 10).

However, thinking conceptually and in diverse ways about what holds meaning for the students was only the starting point. For these teachers, the artistic process must involve doing, making, creating a final product that makes public their internal imaginings. Eisner (2002) affirms this concept when he writes, “The act of representation is an act of discovery and invention and not merely a means through which an individual’s will is imposed upon a material” (p. 239). In essence, shaping matter from the workings of the mind ultimately strengthens mind. Accordingly, skill development held a central place for all of the teachers, with each being driven to ensure students developed their skills to the best of their ability, important in creativity, culturally responsive, and care theories (Kleinfeld as cited in Gay, 2000; Noddings, 1992; Sternberg, 2003). Addressing effect, cause, and interaction as outlined by Cropley (2006), the teachers attended to all of these factors, seeing the value in actual products (effect) that they believe are made possible by helping the students think creatively (cause), in an environment that supports their efforts (interaction). In regard to “effect,” Reynolds (2008) argues, as do Freedman (2010) and Sternberg (2003), that people must believe in their capacity to be creative, and having skills upon which to draw strengthens their confidence in their abilities. The teachers deemed both interest and skill as necessarily

connected and essential. Dewey's (1934) ideas agree with the teachers' way of thinking by holding that "no amount of technical skill and craftsmanship can take the place of vital inspiration; 'inspiration' without it is futile" (p. 277). Robinson (2001) echoes this sentiment when he writes that "technical control is necessary for creative work but it's not enough" (p. 132). Furthermore, Shernoff et al. (2003) suggest that, "teachers may be able to enhance engagement by supporting students' sense of competency and autonomy, such as providing tasks that offer choice, are connected to students' personal goals, and offer opportunities for success" (p. 172), allowing them to reflect on their interests and ultimately shape their sense of self. Ultimately, the teachers in the study believed it was incumbent upon them to teach students to have the skills necessary to believe in their own creativity and feel confident enough to explore their passions.

The interaction component, which deals with whether or not an environment will help a person's creativity flourish or languish, took center stage. All of the teachers conveyed that it would be impossible to help students attain any of their goals without first establishing a nurturing, respectful, fun, and happy environment that honors each individual while at the same time puts the collective good of the group front and center. People writing about creativity frequently state that inspirational and fun environments which allow play are essential for creativity (Florida, 2002; Pink, 2006; Reynolds, 2008; Robinson, 2001). As Pink (2006) writes, "Play is emerging from the shadow of frivolousness and assuming a place in the spotlight" (p. 188). Csikszentmihalyi (2003) agrees that "children need playfulness and the opportunity to express themselves in order to become whole persons, to develop self-confidence, and above all, to enjoy their lives"

(Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 223). The teachers were able to allow students to have fun and play because they had first created a respectful environment in which people felt safe to let go. The teachers believed that without respect the creative process would be stifled and the students could not grow as human beings. This perspective reflects views presented by feminist difference theorists who envision care as working relationally and avoiding harm (Gilligan, 1982; Thompson, 2003). Nieto (1999) also advocates this type of community building within the classroom because it gives students a sense of belonging *and* a sense of responsibility for the healthy functioning of the group. When espousing these intentions, the teachers posited that through modeling they could help their students “gain skills in caregiving and, more important...develop the characteristic attitudes [of caring]” (Noddings, 1992, pp. 23-24). They could also help their students practice bringing out the best in themselves and their peers (Noddings, 1992) which would enhance creativity by helping students love what they do and feel confident to take creative risks (Eisner, 2002; Reynolds, 2006; Robinson, 2001; Sternberg, 2003). This combining of creative and moral components would enhance student thinking and development, meeting the standard of ethicality in the creative process (Cropley, 2006).

Recent thinking on creativity also emphasizes the importance of moving “beyond the individual creator...to a social perspective...[and] how individual and social factors combine during the creative process” (Sawyer, 2003, p. 49). For the teachers in the study, they wanted to heighten student awareness of the social context in which they created. They reflected views similar to Pink’s that empathy is essential for creative thinking and the development of soft skills:

But Empathy isn't sympathy – that is feeling bad *for* someone else. It is feeling *with* someone else, sensing what it would be like to be that person. Empathy is a stunning act of imaginative derring-do, the ultimate virtual reality – climbing into another's mind to experience the world from that person's perspective. (Pink, 2006, p. 159)

They wanted their students to practice empathy in the classroom and hoped that it would carry into their outside lives as well. Stressing the often unspoken value of treating others kindly and compassionately was a conscious aim (Hayes, 2004; NACCE, 1999). They had a plan to “open such spaces where persons speaking together and being together can discover what it signifies to incarnate and act upon values far too often taken for granted” (Greene, 1995, p. 68).

In addition to the teachers wanting to establish a passion for art and make creativity an integral part of all of their students' lives (whether students pursued art in college or professionally or not), creating a sense of community and a space where students could escape from the pressures of school and life was just as, if not more, important. They wanted students to have a sense of control and ownership, to be as much a part of creating the space as the teacher (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004; Nieto, 2002; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). These ideals reflect Noddings' (2003) goals of preparing students to live in a democracy, incorporating such traits as the freedom and capacity to make informed decisions, and a “commitment to inquiry and communication that will produce common values” (p. 238) which, without coercion, will support individual growth and happiness. Research on student engagement that aims to have students take on more adult roles in their education further support these aims (Shernoff et al., 2003).

A final point is that regardless of the area of focus, (i.e., creativity, relationships, skill development), all of the teachers held high standards of excellence and aimed to

scaffold student learning in whatever ways necessary to ensure their students would find success (Shernoff et al., 2003). Care theory for culturally diverse learners in particular stresses the importance of holding high standards and helping students achieve them (Salazar, 2006; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999). The teachers took their responsibility to be the primary carer within the classroom seriously, putting it upon themselves to fashion environments in which students thrived in a multiplicity of ways. They understood that:

the educator's task consists of more than benign neglect; it requires the design of an environment, including the support of the teacher, that will create those zones of proximal development within which the course of children's development can be promoted...An unassisted course of maturation is morally irresponsible; the teacher's task is to design environments that promote educational development of the young. (Eisner, 2002, p. 233)

### **Question Two: Realizing Intentions**

My second question asked: *How are the teacher's intentions realized (or not realized) in their practice?* The case studies provide a clear sense that the teachers realized their intentions; my aim in this section is to build on the case studies and place what I learned in the context of the literature on caring and creativity. Eisner's (1998) five dimensions of educational experience, intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, evaluative, plus Uhrmacher's (1991) aesthetic dimension serve as useful guides when discussing how teacher's intentions were realized, or not realized, in the classroom. I've already addressed the intentional dimension in answering the first research question. I turn now to the remaining dimensions.

#### **Structural Dimension**

As a reminder, the *structural dimension* deals with "how the organizational envelopes we have designed affect how education occurs" (Eisner, 1998, p. 75). It

includes the use of time and physical space, as well as the space for relationships.

Chapter Four provides narrative as well as visual portrayals of several aspects of the structural dimension. The aim in this section is to form a sense of how structural factors such as school policies, budgeting issues, and time affected teachers' efforts to help students develop holistically within the caring and creative environments they fashioned. This broader lens helps us see "what in the design of the environment, particularly the social dimensions of that environment, promotes students learning" (Eisner, 2002, p. 216).

### **School policies.**

Nieto (1999) laments uninspired school policies that squash maximal student development and the teachers who are "victims of school policies and practices that restrict their freedom of choice by allowing few innovations" (p. 77). Greene (1995) argues that teachers "have to strive against limits, *consciously* strive...Where people cannot name alternatives or imagine a better state of things, they are likely to remain anchored or submerged" (p. 52). In line with these perspectives, the teachers worked hard to follow policies that fit their beliefs and changed or ignored those policies they deemed to harm the best interests of their students. For example, Ms. Wright's, Ms. Meyers, Ms. Scott's and Mr. Cole's schools all had a policy banning MP3 players and cell phones. Ms. Wright met with her administrator and obtained permission for her students to use their MP3 players by presenting constructive arguments on how they enhance the learning environment she's creating. Mr. Cole simply followed the "beg forgiveness" rather than ask for permission plan, as did Ms. Scott. As you read in the case studies, both devices

were integral to enhancing the ability of their students to work creatively and feel comfortable in the art space, and students who had them managed their work efficiently and did not have to engage in sneaky behaviors. By advocating for and supporting their students in this way, the teachers modeled effective problem solving, valued students' world views,<sup>29</sup> and created a sense of belonging and autonomy (students managing their own work space) (Nieto, 1999; Noddings, 1992). Trusting the students was an act of confirmation by attributing the best possible motives for using their electronic devices; it also allowed students to practice caring behaviors because they had to attend to their peers and the teachers while at the same time meeting their own needs (Noddings, 1992). The teachers' insights and actions, which established an environment that supported their students, modeled behaviors that teachers in all classes could follow.

The flip side, what I observed when teachers could not or did not have an open device policy, taught an especially worrisome lesson. Students worked hard to master techniques for deception, especially with their cell phone use. They would meander to a section of the room away from the teacher, hide cell phones behind notebooks or under their desks, or wait until the teacher was helping another student and send a text. Instead of learning to control their environment and develop a sense of responsibility for self as well as the collective, or instead of putting their energy into brainstorming and art

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<sup>29</sup> Students today interact with their peers and technology in ways that administrators, and sometimes teachers, struggle to understand and value. It's reminiscent of the old psychology exercise of telling someone NOT to think of the color blue; all he will think about is the color blue. Assuming the worst intentions (e.g., that students will use their phones or MP3 players for illicit activities) and restricting student access to these devices causes some students to obsess about them to the detriment of their work and happiness within the environment. Teaching them how to manage their time and connection to the class, something they will have to do in their adult lives, is critical. We have to ask ourselves if we're willing to tolerate the consequences that come from teaching students that life means having to deceive and lie to people.



production, these students spent a great deal of energy worrying about getting caught and how to avoid doing so. Even the teachers who exhibited the most caring behaviors and tried to help students understand the rationale behind the policies faced barriers to achieving their goals.<sup>30</sup> When teachers could put their students first and meet the social, communal needs of the classroom at the same time, they achieved their intentions of helping students develop creatively, socially, and morally (Noddings, 1992).

Teachers frequently had to work around other school policies that did not fit with what they were trying to achieve with their students. For example, Ms. Wright's school had a policy that students must have a diary with them at all times (a daily organizer) and if they forgot the diary they had to go to their locker and get it. Following this policy would have forced a punitive way of interacting with her students that went against Ms. Wright's philosophy, so she chose not to enforce it. The teachers in these situations were modeling how to stand up for what they believed was right, talking about important concerns with their superiors as needed. Students learned the valuable lesson that sometimes in life they will have to work with others to meet their needs, or the needs of those for whom they are responsible, and that it's worth doing so (Salazar, 2006; Greene, 1995; Noddings, 1992).

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<sup>30</sup> They "caught" their students once in a while, but more often than not the students successfully hid their behaviors. When teachers moved around and interacted more with the students the deception was minimized, but not because of an internal locus of control. Also, the teachers who had the most caring behaviors and had to follow the policy had the lowest incidence of cell phone use, perhaps because students did respect the teacher and tried to show restraint. One scenario captured during observation provides an example of a student trying to manage the policy without deception: Male student to Ms. Carter: May I use my cellular device as a calendar? Ms. Carter: Yes, you may use your cellular device as a calendar. (Smiling)

### **Budgeting.**

Budgeting issues both positively and negatively affected the teachers' ability to achieve their goals with the students. The budget impacted a wide range of areas, two of which I will address in this section: class size and physical space. Other issues related to budget are discussed when examining the structural aspect of time.

### ***Class size.***

As you read in the narratives, class size ranged anywhere from eight to thirty students. Sometimes teachers were able to restrict class size because they didn't have the equipment necessary to teach more than a certain number of students (e.g., the number of cameras and enlargers for the photography classes). Most often, however, school administrators filled classes as needed. Sometimes classes were large because the teachers were popular. The principal at Ms. Scott's school shared that the numbers for her visual arts classes were some of the highest in the school and buffered Ms. Scott against budget cuts. Other times teachers took students who might not be a good fit for the program in order to have the "numbers" needed to offer a course. Mr. Cole shared that he sometimes had to take students who might not have the requisite skills to be in the AP Studio class in order to reach the minimum requirement of 16 students.

Teachers in the large classes felt more frazzled and could not teach one-on-one as much as they liked; to address this gap, they made sure students knew it was okay to come and ask for help, as well as mentor each other (Eisner, 2002; Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004; Noddings, 1992). Students were invited to share their needs and more often than not had the confidence to do so (Greene, 1995; Noddings, 1992; Pink, 2006). It's

important to note that the teachers developed strategies to compensate for budgeting and class size concerns in a way that did not inhibit them from realizing their intentions; having clearly defined their goals of helping students flourish holistically, these teachers were able to find creative ways to deal with potentially negative situations (Noddings, 1992).

In regard to creativity, class size had both positive and negative effects. On a positive note, large class sizes led to social structures that drew upon students' expertise to help their peers (Pink, 2006; Robinson, 2001). Those teachers who had engaged in some form of team-building early in the course and emphasized the importance of the collective benefited from students who functioned more autonomously and facilitated the learning and creative exploration of their peers. On the negative side, the need to help each other stemmed from the impossibility of teachers being able to work one-on-one with the students as much as they'd like. Sternberg (2003) advocates for student-student collaboration, in addition to collaboration with the teacher for the development of creative thinking and production. Collaboration enhances an awareness of multiple options and takes students beyond the first idea, a value held by the teachers in the study. Additionally, the students honed their creative thinking and artistic skills by teaching each other (Eisner, 2002; Sawyer, 2003; Sternberg, 2003). Reynolds (2008) advises that people surround themselves with others who share their enthusiasm and passion and the larger class sizes expanded the pool with whom students could work creatively.

When the teachers first established a community, especially when they used team-building games, a sense of enthusiasm infused the creative process, particularly in the

larger classes. Ms. Carter and Ms. Scott both used games at the beginning and throughout the semester to help students work comfortably with each other. They effectively drew upon the power of play to facilitate trust and initiate creativity (Gude, 2010; Pink, 2006; Reynolds, 2006). Noddings (1992) advocates this type of cooperative interaction as a form of care for the inner circle. The students are colleagues working to help each other maximize their potential. Similar support is found in the literature on care theory for culturally diverse learners. Banks et al. (2001) believe that this type of collegial interaction helps “create or make salient superordinate or cross-cutting groups in order to improve group relations” which in turn makes schools safer, more welcoming places where students can succeed (p. 201). Additionally, such an atmosphere allows for healthy competition which pushes students to do their best work (Noddings, 2003).

Not all students felt secure approaching their teachers for help, and I observed times in all of the classes where students talked negatively about the teacher being too busy. These students tended to express negative thoughts on other topics as well, whether other teachers or peers. They also tended to have personal issues beyond the classroom, as I observed in the topics of their conversations or as I learned from the teachers. However, the teachers all found ways to connect with and help these students. Noddings (1992) believes that this give and take between teachers and students is critical for student happiness, success, and healthy emotional development.

Enabling positive communication also allowed students to encourage and guide each other, in addition to collaboration with the teacher, empowering them as creative thinkers and leaders. This type of warm acceptance might be especially important for

students self-identifying as “creative” based on findings that “many highly creative people, regardless of ethnic background or sexual orientation, grew up feeling like outsiders, different in some way from most of their schoolmates” (Florida, 2002, p. 79). The environments these teachers created helped them feel supported, cared for, and worthy of respect.

In the smaller classes the teachers felt less guilty about not having enough time to provide individual attention. Even so, students in these environments also became self-sufficient and willing to take risks to solve various problems, both features of holistic and creative student development (Dewey, 1909; Eisner, 2002; Sternberg, 2003). I have to acknowledge the special feel of the small classes. One day Ms. Wright had five students missing from her already small class of seven year 11 students. She sat at the table with the two remaining students as they practiced self-portrait skills they’d been learning. A sense of calm exuded as the students looked in their hand-held mirrors, lightly sketching lines on the paper. Ms. Wright gave immediate feedback on little details, everything from where they held their pencils and the pressure with which they drew, to the distance and ratios between the features of the face. The students also worked intimately with each other, looking at each other’s portraits, critiquing and providing feedback, laughing when an image wasn’t just right, exhibiting the value and joy of a small artistic community working relationally (Florida, 2002; Gilligan, 1982; Reynolds, 2008; Robinson, 2009). Similar opportunities occurred when the teachers worked with small groups in the larger setting, but someone or something else always beckoned, preventing the same sense of calm. It is important to attend to the impact of budget constraints on class size, because

many students will never have the opportunity to enjoy such a small setting and grow exponentially as a result. We as adults must be mindful that decisions that result from financial necessity impact students for good or ill, and we have to mitigate their effects.

*Physical space.*

This modeling of creative and caring approaches for their students stands out when examining how teachers managed their physical space as well. For example, when asked how school structure impacts him directly, Mr. Cole shared that:

It's where I use my creativity now. There's not enough time for me to be a creative artist anymore, so I'm a creative teacher. That's where I use my creativity; to make the classroom in a hallway. It was really important for me that they all have their individual desks. If they can have it at [more affluent schools] they can have it here. So, I found a way to do it. I found small science tables; I bugged people to get them over to the school...I have big eyes and I can see the big picture...That's where I use my creativity. "How am I going to make this work?"

Instead of accepting that the students couldn't have their own work space, Mr. Cole found a solution (Greene, 1995). Additionally, as mentioned earlier, a special by-product of the work spaces being in the hallway was that the trust Mr. Cole afforded the students in his class spread to other students in the school. Only two times in the past two years did students have someone disturb their artwork. In fact, the students in Mr. Cole's classes found it easier to collaborate, and students not in Mr. Cole's classes frequently stopped by to see their friends and ooh and ah over their work, building a sense of community and pride (Florida, 2002; Reynolds, 2008). This seemingly little decision opened up opportunities for students to learn about and engage in caring and creative

behaviors<sup>31</sup> (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999). Mr. Cole put his students first and took action by making the learning space special; in doing so he demonstrated his own resiliency and strengthened the connection of the students to their art production, as well as their relationship to him and fellow students.

Sometimes when trying to care for themselves and the students, teachers ran up against obstructions due to budget limitations. Ms. Carter described in detail an ongoing battle she's waged to try and get a proper air ventilation system for her room. She described boiling over at one point when a maintenance worker for the district shared that the only reason they were considering putting a filter in her room was because she shared the space with another teacher. Her response was, "I have 150 kids in my room per semester. And the one teacher should be enough!" Noddings (1992) puts forward the position that teachers and students are in an unequal relationship and that teachers have to work to fulfill different responsibilities accordingly. In this situation, Ms. Carter identified a need in the physical environment that affected students' safety and assumed her responsibility to take care of the problem. Although Gay (2000) does not directly talk about teachers supporting students through the physical space, she does argue for teachers to empower their students. By working diligently to solve a problem and believing that her students are worth a healthy environment, Ms. Carter empowered them to value themselves and modeled how they can solve problems of their own in the future. Upitis (2007) argues against the type of spaces in which the teachers worked, and would empathize with Ms. Carter's plight. If budget issues and the factory model of education

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<sup>31</sup> On a positive budget note, a bond election in the district passed that afforded the building of a new high school to open fall 2009. Mr. Cole had the pleasure of helping design and plan out the new art space incorporating the best elements of what he'd created in the old building.

did not drive school architecture, I could only imagine the spaces these teachers would have designed.

These examples of budget issues affecting the physical space indicate that teachers are impacted by more than just the instructional relationship. Untold factors influence what they do with their students and serve as opportunities for modeling. Despite teachers finding a positive side, I need to point out that continually having to battle such concerns takes a toll. Administrators need to support teachers quickly and firmly to help them avoid burn out and motivate them to continue their work with students. As Palmer (1998) writes, we often become consumed with fear when teaching: fear of failure, fear of not being supported, and fear of not reaching our students. What makes the fear exhausting and more intense in situations involving the physical space, especially health concerns, is the lack of control. Administrators need to stay alert and find ways to immediately address teacher concerns and support them by providing safe and stimulating settings for the students.

### **Time.**

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines the word “wish” as follows: “to have a desire for (as something unattainable)”.<sup>32</sup> For the teachers and students participating in the study, again and again the one thing they wished for was more time: more time to plan, more time to organize, more time to create art, more time to spend together in the art room. However, as the definition indicates, time was frequently something unattainable. Their feelings reflect Florida’s (2002) finding that, “time-use scholars agree on one overwhelming fact about today’s world. It is not so much that we

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/wish>



are ‘overworked,’ but that we suffer from a constant feeling of being rushed – of generally not having enough time in our lives” (Florida, 2002, p. 150).

As mentioned earlier, budget issues impacted the amount of time students had in class. Ms. Carter felt her school had a great schedule with three one and a half hour blocks and two fifty minute periods per week; however, she wished all of the periods could be longer blocks because it afforded students more constructive and thoughtful time to do their work. On block days I observed students taking advantage of the time to work on the wheel because throwing and cleaning up afterwards took so long. My observations matched Ms. Carter’s and the students’, but caused a new worry in light of the fact that the school would be eliminating block classes next year. Worrying about not having enough time affected students and teachers in all of the classes.

The teachers also articulated that some students simply worked more slowly than others and had to have more time to process. Ms. Wright talked about one of her students who had a failing grade for his portfolio because he completed three assignments for every 20 the other students finished. She described him as a talented perfectionist who, when he completed his work, earned top marks in the class. In fact, his self-portrait was one of five class submissions selected for the *2009 Year 12 Perspectives* art show in Western Australia. Although Ms. Wright and the other teachers realized that they were teaching the students life skills such as how to meet deadlines and complete tasks they might not like, they labored over having to stifle the creative process (Reynolds, 2006). Knowing their students intimately deepened their angst, and they worked diligently to support them in whatever ways they could to help them.

Fieldtrips further reduced the amount of time teachers had to work with their students. Despite this loss of time, all of the teachers ultimately loved that their students had such opportunities because they came back refreshed and with new ideas. In regard to art fieldtrips, budgeting restrictions limited such opportunities for some of the teachers, but all of them expressed that fieldtrips were important and strengthened what they did in class. This type of learning finds support in care theory. Ladson-Billings (1994) expresses that, “Real education is about extending students’ thinking and abilities...[and]...makes student learning a more contextualized, meaningful experience” (p. 125) which in turn helps students thrive personally and academically. Having the time for fieldtrips created opportunities for these meaningful experiences. Noddings (2003) also supports this type of creative and flexible use of time because it allows teachers to think through their aims and devise ways to best achieve them with students. Within creativity theory, engaging students in activities that increase opportunities to find new areas of interest and passion may lead to creative insights and art production (Eisner, 2002; Gude, 2010; Hausman, 2010; Sawyer, 2003).

*Making wishes come true: Meeting student needs.*

Because of their commitment to student success and a genuine desire to help students fully engage with and enjoy the creative process, the teachers in the study bent over backwards to find solutions to the problem of time. For example, everyday in almost

every class I observed, students transported art projects to and from home and were able to do so because the teachers had systems in place for students to check out supplies<sup>33</sup>

More significantly the teachers made it possible for students to work in the art room beyond their scheduled time. Extended time with each other allowed more time for creative reflection, a higher level of work quality, and a sense of accomplishment from finishing more intricate pieces than would have been possible within the confines of the class period (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Sternberg, 2003). Every planning period Mr. Cole had several art students working on their projects, and Ms. Wright's students couldn't wait to work in the art shed on their holiday break. Ms. Carter even had students who'd graduated one or more years ago come in to throw on the wheel, which served to help those students stay connected to art and help others (Florida, 2002). All of these interactions resulted from continuity of care, being with the same teacher over time (Barone, 1983; Garner, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Miller, Gilman, & Martins, 2008; Noddings, 1992). The willingness of the teachers to go beyond the structural confines of the regular class day opened up a space for belonging, achievement, and creative expression (Florida, 2002; Noddings, 1992; Nieto, 1999; Reynolds, 2008; Sternberg, 2003; Treffinger, 1995). This yearning for extra time in the art room demonstrates that the teachers realized their intentions of creating a passion for art and a welcoming space in which to work on their art (Eisner, 2002; Reynolds, 2008).

Sometimes the teachers had to establish limits. Ms. Madison told her students that she would only open the art room during lunch three days a week. Her principal

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<sup>33</sup> Some students would take home work in the ceramics class, but very rarely. The tools, supplies, and work space necessary for production and the fragility of the medium precluded most students from feeling comfortable to work on their projects at home.

encouraged Ms. Madison to do so for much needed down time, to be with other teachers, and attend to her own work. She appreciated the caring support of her principal and in turn modeled an important lesson for her students, that it's okay to say no when you need to (Noddings, 1992). Ms. Scott also set aside two lunches per week to eat with her colleagues; all of the other days she allowed students to work in the room during her lunch period.

As important as it was for students to have extra time to complete their work, being able to spend more time in the art room also had intangible, intrinsic values. One of Ms. Wright's students expressed this sentiment as follows:

I don't have to, but I come here at lunch anyway. I also come early when I don't have other classes. I just like the environment. During the holidays, I miss the art shed. It's just so relaxed. It's just so nice.

Having time in the art shed meant much more than having time to get the job done. Extra time in the physical space recharged and energized the students. Much of the attraction stemmed from being around creative, caring, and supportive people. The importance of a stimulating social environment with other creative people is written about in the literature on creativity and educating for creativity. Robinson & Aronica (2009) exhort the importance of finding a "tribe" of people with similar interests and passions to maximize one's potential. The students had found their tribe and clamored for time to spend together doing something they all loved. Having extra time in an aesthetically pleasing environment played a role as well. Teachers allowed students to immerse themselves in the environment as much as possible because they understood the importance of students' connections with the space and their work (Florida, 2002; Hausman, 2010; Noddings, 1992; Robinson & Aronica, 2009; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005) The physical space

fashioned by the art teachers battled against the transmission model of teaching and on its own exuded a feeling of creativity and openness that inspired the students (Upitis, 2004).

All of the teachers in the study expressed intentions of teaching larger life lessons that facilitated holistic and creative growth and how they managed time helped them do so. Students learned that: sometimes you have to go outside the confines or structures imposed on you to accomplish your goals; people who care for you will go out of their way to help you succeed, even if it makes their lives a little more difficult; something worth doing is worth doing well and may take extra time to ensure that it is done well; caring for others and yourself at the same time requires a lot of give and take; flexible thinking and a willingness to try something different enables you to find solutions to seemingly fixed problems; and more. Students' behaviors evidenced an understanding of these lessons, whether bringing in biscuits to share with their peers and the teacher when working after school or thanking their teachers over and over for the extra time, supplies, or support. Not all students took advantage of hanging out or working in the art room, but those who did would have had very different school experiences, significantly less happy ones based on my observations. The laughter, dancing, and smiles I witnessed during extra time in the art room are a testament to the feelings of joy made possible by making wishes come true (Gude, 2010; Noddings, 2003; Reynolds, 2008; Robinson, 2001). In writing about all students, Eisner (2002) suggests that, "*Joy* is not a term that is used much in the context of education but if the arts are about anything, they are about how they make you feel in their presence" (p. 85). This sense of joy exhibited itself repeatedly and powerfully in the actions of the students in the study.

*Giving up on wishes: Not meeting teachers' needs.*

The teachers' wished for more time to get everything done, as well as time for their own creative reflection and work; unlike the students' wishes, however, the teachers' wishes seemed unattainable given existing school structures. Although Ms. Madison's principal helped her as much as she could, by encouraging her to take some lunches for herself, Ms. Madison, as a part-time teacher, still worked almost full-time hours. Teaching six classes (sometimes having six different preps for those subjects) and having only one planning period (that they usually dedicated to the students) wore the teachers down. Although the students recharged them and helped them approach each day with renewed vigor, the burdens of the time structure took a personal toll. All of the teachers had extra duties to fulfill as well, some of which included (but were not limited to): Mr. Cole helping with the school play, Ms. Madison assisting with playground duty, Ms Scott sponsoring student government which met before school, Ms. Meyers developing curriculum for the state, or Ms. Wright organizing student work for an art show (something all of the teachers do at some point). Budgeting constraints made it necessary for teachers to take on these extra duties and precluded them from having two planning periods to more effectively and creatively carry out their teaching duties to the best of their abilities.

The teachers managed the workload beautifully and were present for their students, but I could only imagine how much more amazing they would be if their wish for more time came true. Examining this issue becomes critical when answering the question of how and if teachers realize their intentions in the classroom. Two of the

teachers who participated in the study have since resigned. The load became too heavy to bear, especially when the ethics of the environment in which they worked clashed with their own. Ms. Wright faced tremendous pressure to change her way of working with the students to more closely match the restricted, talking-head teaching going on in much of the rest of the school. Administrators slowly chipped away at the rewards she received from teaching until she could no longer justify sacrificing her personal happiness, time with her family, and creative expression. Mr. Cole faced a mandate to march in step with a rigid curriculum model that although in theory could help the students, in reality stifled everything valuable about the visual arts program and became one thing too much for him to manage. Ms. Scott currently feels so overwhelmed by being pulled in dozens of different directions to meet the needs of the school that she does not know if she will return to teach next year. Her principal wants Ms. Scott to reach out to the community, but Ms. Scott doesn't even have the time to make the phone calls to gather support.

These caring and creative teachers who mean the world to most of their students will no longer realize their intentions in the classroom. I think it's important to pay attention to the fact that all of these teachers stated that not having time for their own creative work was also a factor in their decisions to resign (or possibly resign in the case of Ms. Scott). I believe such caring and creative teachers themselves need supportive environments in which to thrive. Studies on teacher attitudes and retention examine what all teachers need to find happiness in their profession (Palmer, 1998). Attention to this issue is even more critical for creative and caring teachers. They are part of the "creative-class," creative people who:

want to contribute; they want to be heard...[they] see themselves simply as “creative people” with creative values, working in increasingly creative workplaces, living essentially creative lifestyles. And, in this sense, they represent a new mainstream setting the norms and pace for much of society. (Florida, 2002, p. 211)

Schools tend not to honor creativity or be places in which creative people can thrive (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1995). I propose that administrators pay especially close attention to how to support these types of teachers because they connect with students often lost in other areas of the system and losing them to teaching has painful consequences (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Salazar, 2008). By failing to make teachers’ wishes come true, students ultimately suffer.

### **Curricular, Pedagogical, Evaluative, and Aesthetic Dimensions**

How the teachers in the study used themselves, the materials, their lessons, the students, and the classroom systems all impacted their effectiveness in attaining their goals and the subsequent impact on the students. For these teachers, what they taught, the way in which they taught, the physical space they created, and the materials they used all made a difference and helped them achieve their goals. Critical for understanding how the teachers realized their intentions is the fact that the more they addressed both creative and caring components to help students develop holistically, the more effective they were in reaching their goals. The students’ confidence, creativity, and passion stood out during class observations and the individual student interviews. External curricular restraints affected teachers’ decisions and planning, but overall the teachers shaped external expectations to meet their needs. What they hoped would happen actually happened. The anomalies, the times when they failed to reach certain students, cropped up occasionally,



but they too were in direct proportion to how successful teachers were at creating the settings they envisioned.

The teachers in the study expressed a desire to fashion caring and creative environments that facilitated skill acquisition, positive social interactions, autonomy, responsibility, and creative expression. Their ultimate goal was to immerse students in learning communities that validated them as people, helped them find their voices, and imbued in them a love for the arts and art production. Running throughout are decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, and aesthetics, which I will examine within the theoretical constructs of caring and creativity.

### **Caring environments.**

The centers of care that materialized as significant during the study were: care for self; care for the inner circle; care for animals, plants, and the Earth; care for the human made world; and care for ideas (Noddings, 1992). Concepts articulated in care for culturally diverse learners and feminist difference theory echo themes within these centers of care and inform our exploration of how they relate to teachers' success in realizing their intentions in their classes.

### ***Care for self – spirituality.***

Sometimes students would move in spiritual directions when given the freedom to explore and study self. When describing spirituality Noddings (2003) suggests that “enhanced awareness of certain features in everyday life can contribute significantly to spiritual life and to happiness” (p. 168). She explains that spirituality is manifested in an appreciation for and connection to the world, including broader natural and more intimate

elements around the home. I share the words she uses to capture this appreciation because they set the tone for how students expressed their own spirituality:

Perhaps we are all momentarily overcome with the immensity of the sea, its beauty in the sunrise, our tenuous place in the universe, and a continually renewed wonder at the start of the day... The spiritual moments discussed here do not come as a result of detachment or meditation. They are, rather, moments of complete engagement with what-is-there. (Noddings, 2003, p. 168)

Noddings also acknowledges the darker sides of spirituality, but suggests educators focus on its positive attributes. She emphasizes the value of communal spirituality, cautions against self-indulgence, and advocates that students go “forth as positive contributors to the public realm” (Noddings, 2003, p. 175). Nieto (1999) points out that many African-American students benefit from being in environments that embrace spirituality, as it reflects a cultural style referred to as *Afrocultural expression* which “emphasizes spirituality, harmony, movement, verve, communalism, oral tradition, and expressive individualism, elements that are either missing, downplayed or disparaged in most mainstream classrooms” (p. 67). Spirituality has captured the attention of people within science and business as well. Pink (2006) tells a story of how MIT invited the Dalai Lama to speak about spirituality and shares his belief that, “At the very least, we ought to take spirituality seriously because of its demonstrated ability to improve our lives – something that might be even more valuable when so many of us have satisfied (and oversatisfied) our material needs” (Pink, 2006, p. 221). Greene (1995) urges educators to battle against the “shadow side in American culture – an uncaring, separatist aspect too many associate with freedom” (p. 67). By allowing students to explore spirituality within the classroom in connection with their peers, the teachers in the study had joined the battle.

Spirituality revealed itself in how students talked about their work, as well as the photo essays designed to elicit information on how the visual arts experience transcended the classroom for the students interviewed. The theme of being inspired by nature repeated throughout. For many students, this inspiration came from simple things they never paid attention to before such as a tree, pebbles on their driveway, or a pelican's eye. Many of the students shared thoughts such as, "Mainly it's like I'm seeing things now differently than I did before," connecting them to the world around them in ways that evoked feelings of something greater and richer than they ever realized, whether the lighting at sunset over the ocean or a dusting of snow covering a mountain top. Curricular decisions to take students out into nature or bring images of nature into the classroom (as well as those that asked students to notice little details) sparked the beginnings of spiritual connections by developing an appreciation for world around them. Ms. Madison's fieldtrip to Rottnest Island and Ms. Wright's fieldtrips to the beach serve as examples, as do Mr. Cole's and Ms. Scott's encouragement of students to complete assignments outside, either during school or at home. Raindrops on a car window, a face morphed into a tree, branches weighted down heavy with snow, rock outcroppings with a stormy sea in the background are but a few of the images created by students reflecting their patient, spiritual interactions.

Several students in the study explored spirituality through conceptual assignments presented by the teachers. Some assignments asked students to pick an area of interest or reflect something important to them, and in these situations students frequently drew upon their religious or spiritual beliefs. As you read, students used different artistic media

to metaphorically examine a wide variety of religious and spiritual concepts, such as good and evil, sin, heaven and hell, and transcendence. Their comfort to do so stemmed from pedagogical decisions made by the teachers who modeled acceptance of others' values and ideas (as long as they were not harmful to others) (Cropley, 2006; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1992).

*Care for self – occupational life.*

Teaching care for self also includes providing students “opportunities to become genuinely engaged in activities that contribute to development” (Noddings, 1992, p. 87). The notion is that doing something “whole heartedly” helps students not only learn procedural methods but to learn about one’s abilities, interests, strengths, etc. Noddings (1992) summarizes well Dewey’s concept of occupational life as consisting of and informing communication, construction, expression, and investigation.<sup>34</sup> Although she and Dewey reference these areas as developmentally appropriate for younger children, my observations showed that they are tremendously important for and relevant to development when consciously attended to at a secondary level in a visual arts setting.

*Care for self – occupational life: communication.*

Teachers attended to the importance of communication throughout all of the dimensions of the classroom experience. In the curricular dimension the teachers expected students to know each other’s names, work respectfully together, and feel safe to talk about things important to them, whether related to class or not. Ms. Smith and Ms. Carter, as you saw, enacted these intentions by playing name games with the students at the beginning of each semester. Pedagogically, all of the teachers would encourage

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<sup>34</sup> I examine investigation under the section “Nurtures a Passion for Exploration.”

students to talk with their peers if they needed help, wanted to brainstorm on a project, or desired an opportunity to celebrate a finished product. They would also talk with students about art-related questions, as well as things important to the students in their daily lives, whether it be a play in which they were performing or an idea for a project.<sup>35</sup> Pink (2006) believes that this type of communication is a critical “high touch” skill which “involves the ability to empathize [and] to understand the subtleties of human interaction” (p. 52). Robinson (2001) agrees with Pink’s assessment and writes that:

In recent years, there has been a new recognition of the necessity to develop the ability to understand, express and use our feelings and intuitions...The ability to express and manage feelings, to communicate clearly, be a good listener, to know who you are, and relate with other people are not taught in the conventional academic curricula of most schools. (pp. 139-140)

In the evaluative dimension, the teachers expected students to communicate their ideas kindly and respectfully, and to be willing to hear and integrate criticism into their creative process. They held the same standard for themselves, knowing that “judgments *can* impede student performance and *can* thwart student learning if they are conveyed to students in insensitive ways” (Eisner, 2002, p. 180). Aesthetically, the teachers used materials around the room to facilitate and inspire communication. Past student work, pictures of work done by professional artists, photographs of past students, posters for the school play designed by someone in the class, all served as conversation starters. The teachers also communicated expectations for their students aesthetically. For example, Ms. Scott hand lettered a sign with her class rules using different colors that exuded both the seriousness of the rules and the light-hearted assumption that students already knew

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<sup>35</sup> I will talk more about students feeling comfortable to communicate their needs and share their feelings about the class in the section on care for the inner circle.

how to communicate and that it was her job simply to help them in case they forgot. “1. Treat everyone with Respect at all times; 2. Don’t create a problem; 3. When a rule violation occurs, Miss Smith reserves the right to do something about it.”

Numerous examples of the importance of communication occurred during my observations and are a direct result of teacher beliefs in action. Students talked with each other continually while they worked, when they needed to take a break, when they arrived, and when they lingered not wanting to leave for the next class (Hausman, 2010; Robinson, 2001; Sternberg, 2003). They asked after each other if a classmate was not present; someone was always ready to share that he or she was at the dentist, home sick, or making up a test. They needed to process events that happened to them outside of class as well as within class. I recorded dozens of times in all of the classes when students talked about other classes, their teachers, and grades. They felt comfortable with each other and with the teacher to communicate the good, the bad, and the silly.

Once in a while the teachers would ask students to keep it down, but only when the volume increased significantly. Perhaps most strikingly were the comfortable silences that would permeate the classrooms when students were in a zone. During these moments students communicated non-verbally, sidling past each other as they moved about the room getting supplies, cleaning, etc.

*Care for self – occupational life: construction.*

I will address construction more when attending to creativity, but want to point out here the importance of construction for enhancing students’ occupational lives (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2002). The challenge of the work and the high expectations of the

teachers offered students opportunities to completely engage in the creative process, to be fully occupied, whether delicately trimming a bowl on the wheel, finely painting a self-portrait on tissue paper, or stitching a topping for a fabric cupcake. Also noteworthy is that not only did students construct at school, they continued to do so in their own homes. Sometimes it was the case that the teacher reinforced already existing passions for art, but frequently students had never before seen art as an important part of their lives. Several of the students interviewed shared that they now have art spaces at home where they love to escape and work. The teachers designed curricula that allowed students to immerse themselves in constructing art in class and beyond, actions that relate directly to flow theory which aims to enhance student concentration, interest, and enjoyment and subsequent engagement with and enjoyment of creative tasks (Shernoff et al., 2003).

In addition to the curricular aspects of construction, pedagogically teachers inspired their students by sharing a passion for art in their lives and bringing in their own work. Every teacher in the study had students comment on the importance of seeing their teachers' artwork and learning about the role of constructing art in their teachers' lives. They were also moved by watching their teachers work during class and this type of modeling as an effective pedagogical strategy is advocated in both care and creativity theory (Gay, 2000; Noddings, 2002; Robinson & Aronica, 2009; Sternberg, 2003).

In the evaluative dimension, all of the teachers shared that effort meant more to them than artistic talent. Instilling in students the ability to immerse themselves in their work and bring ideas to fruition had the highest value for these teachers. They ascertained effort by watching students work, looking for growth in each individual student's work

versus comparing it to the collective, and talking with students about their own perceptions of effort. Ultimately, through evaluation, teachers hoped to empower students to refine their techniques to better able express their ideas. Some of the most animated and compassionate discussions I observed in the classes occurred when teachers met with students to evaluate their work, indicating that the evaluative process was not only the examination of a finished product but rather another learning and relationship opportunity (Salazar, 2008; Hausman, 2010).

*Care for self – occupational life: expression.*

The concept of expression as a part of care for self suggests that artistic expression (e.g., visual arts, music, and dance) allows students to develop holistically. The obvious role of expression through visual art dominates this discourse, and student perspectives presented in the case studies attest to the importance of this type of expression in their lives. What I want to share here is that other forms of expression contributed to student happiness and development. One of Ms. Wright's students captured this idea beautifully when she said that, "Art class is very free, and it's very fun, like we're always laughing about something all the time." Having the freedom to engage in various forms of expression helped students feel alive and reinforced Dewey's (1934) notion that "demand for variety is the manifestation of the fact that being alive we seek to live, until we are cowered by fear or routine" (p. 175). The teachers fashioned environments that enlivened students, calmed their fears, and used routine to enhance variety versus squash it. By allowing students to engage in varied forms of expression, such as dancing and singing (activities observed in all of the classes), the teachers taught



them that people express themselves in different ways, frequently in ways not valued or permitted in other classrooms. As one of Ms. Cole's students shared:

When you're here it's different because we're not just all sitting at desks. We get up and move around, and we look at each other's stuff, and we critique each other's artwork and stuff. Other classes we just sit there and take notes.

The pedagogical choices of these teachers to allow movement and alternative forms of expression which enhanced individual student work and modeled an acceptance of diverse ways of being. In regard to care for self, students learned that they might need to move, sing, dance, tap, etc. when they work, or that they accomplish more when they communicate with others, critical components for holistic education and development.

*Care for self – occupational life: career exploration.*

Noddings' (1992) concept of care for self also talks about helping students explore actual occupations or career opportunities. All of the teachers worked with students to help them discern what role art might play in their professional lives. Part of their curricular objectives were to introduce students to possible careers in art, some that required further study at the post-secondary level, others that involved apprenticeship. The teachers knew their students well and worked to ensure that however they wanted art to be a part of their lives beyond high school, doors would be open.

In this area as well, the teachers modeled creativity by helping students think about occupations that would allow them to integrate art in their lives. Within several lessons I observed, the teachers presented the work of currently practicing professional artists and talked about their inspirations, methods, and lifestyles. The students were engaged and asked meaningful, probing questions to help them grasp what being a professional artist means. In addition, the students interviewed all talked about how their

teachers' work influenced them and inspired them to think about the role of art in their professional and/or personal lives. The teachers recognized that the social nature of art and the cultural factors influencing creativity not only influence design but occupational choices as well (Pink, 2006; Moran & John-Steiner, 2003; Robinson, 2001).

*Care for self – recreational life.*

Noddings writes that “it is important for all young people to discover what refreshes and renews them. A well-integrated life includes intervals of activity that energize and make us feel whole” (Noddings, 1992, p. 89). The teachers studied impacted students' recreational life in two primary ways by: 1) creating a space where students wanted to spend their time because they enjoyed the camaraderie and feel of the space and 2) empowering and motivating students to bring art into their lives outside of school.

The classroom space informed and strengthened students' recreational life because of the social setting and the aesthetics. Socially students felt that they could relax and be themselves, whether serious or silly. They felt reenergized by interacting with their peers and the teacher in an open and honest manner and chose to work in the art room every chance they could.<sup>36</sup> When I asked one of Ms. Carter's student's about the personality of the class, she replied that is was, “Relaxing; mornings are really stressful ‘cause I have all of my hardest classes. And then I come here and I calm down.” The environment and control over the decision making process felt liberating and helped students enjoy learning (Shernoff et al., 2003; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). Aesthetically, students responded to being away from the factory feeling of the rest of their classes which “embody the transmission model of learning” perpetuated by the design of the

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<sup>36</sup> See the section on “Time.”

buildings (Upitis, 2004, p. 20). Their teachers worked hard to fashion environments that embraced movement, warmth, and soft edges, which energized the student. Students also loved working with people who shared their passion for art, their “tribe” as described earlier (Robinson & Aronica, 2009). Students learned that being with people who share your passion, care for you, and allow you to be yourself enrich their lives (Florida, 2002). Students also learned the importance of spending time with people who value and accept you for you. As a result they understood that such feelings are possible and important for them in the future.

In addition to camaraderie and acceptance, the students discovered the invigorating and uplifting role of art in their lives. All of the students interviewed now engage in art at home. The content of the lessons and the environment the teachers created (curricular), the communal spirit of the classroom and their kind demeanor (pedagogy), the ability to explore and make mistakes (pedagogy) and the inspiring design of the physical space and the time to connect to this space (aesthetics) all helped students learn how to care for their recreational well-being. This sense of enjoyment and their desire and ability to engage in art as a form of recreation meant a great deal to the students and will serve them life-long (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2002; Hausman, 2010).

***Care for the inner circle.***

Noddings (1992) describes caring relationships, particularly caring relationships that last over time, as those in which both parties give and receive the care offered within the relationships and are seen as either “equal” or “unequal” relations. Equal relations are those in which the responsibility to provide care, and the give and take of caring

behaviors within the relationships are equivalent. Friendships and relations with colleagues fall into this category in that “both stand ready to be carers, and both respond appreciatively as cared-for” (Noddings, 1992, p. 91). In unequal caring relations, one of the parties has a greater responsibility to provide care for the other and “occupies the position of carer most of the time, and the other is necessarily the cared-for” (p. 91). In the classrooms studied, students had occasion to participate in equal and unequal relations, learning and/or reinforcing what it means to care and be cared for in their lives. Additionally, students’ experiences in the art room and the work they produced frequently impacted their relationships with family members, providing opportunities for parents, siblings, and other family members to interact in caring and cared for ways with the students.

The importance of honoring the relationships within the classroom, as well as external relationships important to students, is a constant theme in care theories for culturally diverse learners as well. In regard to equal relations, theorists and researchers alike advocate curricular and pedagogical strategies that support students getting to know each other and working together through a foundation of respect (Banks, et al., 2001) The goal is to establish a sense of belonging, commitment to the group, an awareness that one’s actions affect other people, and the ability to let others care for you in return (Nieto, 1999)

In regard to unequal relationships, when teachers create respectful environments in which students know a teacher who respects them and expects them to respect each other, they help all students, perhaps most significantly Chicano/Mexicano students who

work best in a community built on respect (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2006). Difference feminist theorists aim to promote genuine care versus a fictionalized version which is “problematic if it invokes a nostalgic ideal referenced to an imaginary past in which children enjoyed all the blessing of the perfect home” (Thompson, 2003, p. 40).

Ultimately, the teacher is the guide in that “the tone of the teacher’s language, the way in which the pace of the class is modulated, and most important, the ability to improvise in the face of uncertainty, are critical” (Eisner, 2002, p. 48). The teachers in the study experienced stressful and demanding classroom dynamics and events that put them in the driver’s seat to direct and care for the students. They effectively managed such issues and as a result realized their goals to establish caring environments.

*Care for the inner circle – equal relations – friends*

Noddings (1992) writes that “...true friends will protect each other not only from external evil but also from evil that arises internally. When we care, as we must about a friend, we continually support the quest for a better self” (p. 98). The teachers purposefully designed lessons and activities that affirmed this belief and made it possible for students to care for each other. Not all of the students became friends or had friends in class, and I will talk about those relationships under the next section on colleagues. Those who did, however, delighted in their friendships and attributed them to their teachers’ actions. All of the teachers also created a setting in which students made new friends with whom they could have fun and offer support.

As described in the case studies, the teachers consciously promoted and supported an environment in which students were encouraged to care for their friends by permitting

them talk with each other about art and life in general. As long as students completed their work to meet high standards, communication was encouraged and added to the overall warmth of the classroom environment. I observed a continual give and take between friends on a wide variety of issues. Students: helped each other work through homework problems; firmly prohibited a friend from ditching another class; complimented a good haircut; asked how they could help at their friend's baby shower; worked patiently to teach a new skill; sympathized with the heartache of a break-up; and listened when their friend had to talk yet again about another friend's suicide. Life outside the classroom had a place within the classroom and in fact enhanced teachers' efforts with the students artistically because it strengthened the person-environment fit and helped them feel safe to put forth their ideas and rely on each other for help (Florida, 2002; Robinson, 2001; Sternberg, 2003).

On occasion students who were friends outside of school had a falling out and brought the bad feelings into the classroom. In those situations, the teachers drew upon their goals of positive communication and helped the students, at the very least, figure out how to interact with each other respectfully. Students learned that relationships are fluid and dynamic; their teachers taught them how to manage the good and the bad (Thompson, 2003).

Students' experiences in the visual arts classes also impacted their relationships with friends outside of class. Their friends would help them with art projects, acting as models, collaborating creatively, or just having fun with them as they worked. All of the students interviewed talked about how their artistic work strengthened their friendships,

and several of them included pictures of their friends in their photo essays. All of the stories the students shared portrayed a strengthening of their friendships, as well as a sense of pleasure in being able to make someone else happy through their art (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Tatum, 1997).

*Care for the inner circle – equal relations – colleagues*

In her discussion on caring for colleagues, Noddings (1992) believes that such relationships should go beyond “cordiality and verbal respect” (p. 101). She also advocates healthy competition in which students as colleagues support each other to achieve their best, versus traditional competitive classroom settings that induce students to cheat and act in other morally bereft ways. The indicators of healthy competition are having fun, being able to celebrate the victories of your peers, and “turning in better performances or products as a result” (p. 103). The teachers in the study worked consciously to establish environments, behavioral expectations, and evaluations that informed meaningful and helpful relationships between students. The students talked about the distinction between friends and colleagues and expressed that having collegial relations with each other helped them find artistic success in a warm environment. The value of these collegial relations extended beyond the classroom as well, with students feeling supported by their visual arts classmates within the broader structure of the school. These perceptions matter because the students felt a sense of belonging, connected to the school, which is a key factor in determining student success, especially for culturally diverse learners (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005).

Sometimes problems did arise and teachers and students addressed the situations in ways that honored the individual and the needs of the group. The story I shared earlier about the young man in Ms. Meyers' class who did not want to be in art is one such example. The important point to note is that Ms. Meyers did not ignore the situation and made it clear that she would not let him adversely affect the other students. Ms. Scott's decision to separate students disrupting each other's work also helped establish the setting as one for working with colleagues, not hindering each other's efforts. Students participated in genuine struggles, learning that relationships take work and communication, valuable life skills that support their ongoing development (Blanch, 2007; Garner, 2007; Noddings, 1992).

Pedagogically the teachers further supported collegial interactions by implementing systems for materials acquisition and cleaning that built a sense of responsibility and community (Nieto, 1999). The teachers all developed systems that allowed their students to get what they needed when they needed it. Students knew how to gather materials and put them away correctly for others. They understood how important it was for materials to be where they belonged for their own work and drew upon this awareness when organizing the materials for their classmates. A sense of pride exuded from having the liberty to access resources at any time, and students wanted to ensure that they held on to this privilege.

The teachers also implemented practices that put the responsibility for cleaning on the community. Students had to rely on peers from other classes to do their part so they wouldn't have to clean before starting their work. Ms. Scott implemented a healthy



competition between classes to motivate students who did not inherently value taking care of materials for other people, and it served its purpose well (Noddings, 1992).

Students wanted to have the other classes clean the paint brushes, restock the photography chemicals, put things back in their proper place, etc.; in other words, to care for them. Their feelings of frustration when these things were not done more often than not motivated them to show that they were more caring, drawing again upon that sense of healthy competition. Such an essential but mundane task as cleaning taught the students a great deal about how to be there for others and that their actions make a difference.

*Care for the inner circle – unequal relations – teacher/student*

At one point during my observations, Ms. Scott and I were talking about the large number of immigrant families and students from Mexico attending Peak High School. She shared that at parent teacher conferences instead of asking about their student's academic performance many of the parents wanted to know if their student treated the teacher with respect; they placed a high value on this aspect of their student's behavior. It was not the case that academics did not matter; it was the case that something else came first. This story struck a chord at the time and took on even greater meaning as I began relating what I observed to the literature. It reinforced my belief that without attention to expanding care theory for culturally diverse learners in a way that embraces and attends to their world view, important aspects of students' experiences would go unnoticed or misunderstood, especially as they applied to interactions between students and teachers. The literature on student-teacher relationships for culturally diverse learners is replete with advice and cautions on how important these affiliations are for the students. I

reiterate several of the most salient concepts as they relate to Noddings' foundational care theory, supporting their importance with evidence from my observations.

Starting with care theory as the base, the student-teacher relationship is an unequal relationship in which "teachers have special responsibilities that students cannot assume" (Noddings, 1992, p. 107). Teachers decide on and implement curriculum, shape the classroom environment and interactions of people within that environment, evaluate students, serve as gatekeepers of external influences, purchase and maintain supplies, and more. In ideal circumstances teachers attend to this unequal role and shape environments that allow students to assume some caring responsibilities in ways that help them mature and flourish (Eisner, 2002).

The teachers I observed worked mindfully to fashion such environments, ones in which "...teachers no longer simply deposit knowledge into students' minds [but are] actively engaged in learning through their interactions with students" (Nieto, 1999, p. 142). They engaged in best practices that afforded students the opportunity to view the art classroom as "'homes away from home,' places where they were nourished, supported, protected, encouraged, and held accountable" (Gay, 2000, 47).

Noddings' care theory, expanded with ideas for culturally diverse learners, focuses our attention on what teachers did that made these feelings of connection and trust possible. According to Noddings it is the responsibility of students to be caring, to receive care, and to communicate their needs:

All children need to feel safe in their relations with teachers. It must be acceptable to admit error, confusion, or even distaste for the subject at hand. But students must also accept responsibility for communicating their needs to teachers... The contributions of teachers and students are necessarily unequal, but they are

nonetheless mutual; the relationship is marked by reciprocity (Noddings, 1992, p. 108).

The literature for culturally diverse learners indicates that this reciprocity is made possible by partnerships “anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence” (Gay, 2000, p. 52). This type of relationship is one in which instructional method “ceases to be an instrument by which teachers can manipulate students, but rather expresses the consciousness of the students themselves” (Salazar, 2008, p. 342). Several students expressed the importance of the teacher not talking at them, but allowing them the space to examine and share their burgeoning awareness. One of Ms. Carters’ students captured the idea well when she said, “[She] does not necessarily ‘teach’ me but instead allows me to grow my own knowledge through her motivation.” Race need not be a barrier in forming caring relationships; Nieto (2002) writes that, “The proof is growing that all teachers – regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender – who care about, mentor, and guide their students can have a dramatic impact on their futures” (p. 9). The teachers I observed did not always come from the same cultural background but made a difference because of their genuine concern for the students.

The teachers designed, enacted, and assessed lessons which valued student voices and opinions and established a space which facilitated communication. Various assignments incorporated students’ life experiences and what they thought about different issues. Students were empowered, in fact pushed, to share their thoughts and feelings through their work. Developing lessons that required students to explore their cultural heritage at a variety of levels reaffirmed that their lives mattered, further strengthening

their relationship to their teachers and fellow students. The assignments and manner in which the teachers interacted with the students are indicative of a permeable curriculum in that they allowed “for an interactional space drawing on official school knowledge and students’ own cultural, social, and linguistic resources” (Dyson as cited in Salazar, 2008, p. 343).

Pedagogically, trust was enormously important for the students. The teachers in the study assumed best intentions and offered trust whole heartedly. When not teaching in environments in which the students already knew each other, the teachers engaged in activities to open communication. Their commitment to creating a warm environment communicated to the students that their teacher cared, laying the foundation for trust. They expected their students to respect them and each other and act in ways that supported the entire community. This respect meant so much for the students because it helped them trust their teacher and begin to trust themselves to act capably and responsibly. It also allowed teachers to hold students accountable because the students knew the teachers’ intentions were not punitive but rather stemmed from wanting the best for them. As Ms. Scott shared with a student who was struggling one day, “Part of my job as your teacher is to push you, challenge you.” She and the other teachers did so most effectively when they acknowledged the unequal nature of the relationship and consciously worked to first establish reciprocal trust. In Ms. Meyer’s situation when she struggled to let her students in, to trust them to have a relationship with her, they felt the distance. Her choice did not have drastic consequences, but when compared to the other

teachers, I believe she could have helped her students achieve so much more through greater trust.

Trust was important for all of the students, but as you read in the case study, the Chicano/Mexicano students in Mr. Cole's classes talked about it more frequently and with greater appreciation. Mr. Cole and Ms. Scott's efforts to speak Spanish with their students and unequivocal acceptance of first language usage in class let students know that all aspects of them as people were accepted (Salazar, 2008; Nieto, 2002). Their passion reflects the importance of *confianza* (mutual trust) and *buen ejemplos* (exemplary models) for these students (Salazar, 2008). The reciprocal nature of trust laid the foundation for meaningful relationships with the teachers, a give and take versus the teacher dominating and controlling (Nieto, 1999; Noddings, 1992; Poon, 2004).

Of particular significance is Mr. Cole's student who identified good teaching practices as a trust issue. Students should go to school each day with the confidence that their teachers will do what they need to in order to help students learn. Too often students feel like failures because they cannot master the material, regardless of the subject. In the art classrooms, the teachers presented material one way, then another, and another, and even engaged fellow students to help. Not all students achieved the same level of mastery, even if they put forth their best effort; but, they did all learn each skill. Intuitively all teachers know that I'm simply describing good teaching, but something that is still missing in countless classrooms (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004; Nieto, 2002). Looking at good teaching as a trust issue further strengthens the case that teachers must assume their responsibilities in this arena (Noddings, 1992). The fact that students said

they trusted their art teachers to help them learn and felt respected in their art classrooms might offer some insight into the findings of Shernoff et al. (2003) that:

Students reported that math was one of the most academically intense experiences, rating it as the most challenging and relevant. However, students appeared to feel more negatively about math than other subjects. On the other hand, art, which was the subject participants expressed enjoying the most, was also reported to be the least relevant to participants and their future goals. (p. 173)

The trusting, welcoming, caring, supportive, *and* challenging environments the art teachers created helped students learn and engage within visual arts in ways not found in other content areas. The teachers were always there for the students when they needed help. When students did not understand something, or were having difficulty mastering a skill or concept, they felt confident to ask for help from the teacher. I recorded hundreds of instances when the teachers worked one-on-one with students who had asked for help; students felt safe to express their needs, frustrations, disappointments, and worries. They trusted their teachers to work with them as adults and to help them manage their own learning. Often times in class and the professional world students will come up against deadlines that are inflexible (Pink, 2006; Reynolds, 2008). At the same time, much more flexibility exists outside of high school and the pressure often put on students ignores this reality. In addition, once out of high school, students need to know how to negotiate with and communicate their needs to others (Noddings, 2003). The students felt comfortable asking for more time when they poured their full energy into a project, or even if they felt overwhelmed by other coursework; the teachers responded as caring adults to help them do their best work. One of Ms. Scott's students talked about this issue:

I feel more safe, because sometimes I'm like, "My head is about to explode off my shoulders from the amount of stuff I need to get done!" As long as you talk to her she'll be like, "Yeah. As long as you're working, I see you're working, I'll

extend your deadline.” It’s very flexible, whereas in a science class, “Hey, I was up really late last night, I had a lot of homework, didn’t get this one done.” “Oh well, that stinks. Zero in the grade book.” It’s like, “I’m trying my best. I’m trying to talk with you. I’m trying to work with you. Why won’t you work with me the same way?” It’s more equal I think in art.

The teachers in the study worked hard to empower students versus beating them down in an abuse of the unequal power differential inherent to student-teacher relationships.

Sometimes student-teacher relationships develop beyond unequal relations. “If a teacher-student relation moves in this direction, it becomes one of mature friendship, and the formal relation, the necessary relation, fades away. Students are set free by their teacher’s efforts at inclusion to pursue their own growth, and this is exactly the response good teachers seek” (Noddings, 1992, p. 107). I witnessed several occasions where the student-teacher relationship was fading away and this more mature form of friendship evolved. Not all educational professionals support this transition, stating that it’s not the place of teachers to be friends with students. Perhaps they feel this way because not all teachers act as responsible adults with whom students learn to have a mature friendship. However, when clear boundaries are established these types of friendships dramatically impact students in positive ways.

Research with culturally diverse learners acknowledges this impact, especially when students believe their teacher “listened to and respected them, encouraged them to express their opinions, and was a friend toward them both in and out of class” (Gay, 2000, p. 49). During the study students rarely referred to their teachers as friends, although they would describe them as “friendly.” When they did, I was able to pinpoint examples within the classroom and conversations with the teacher that suggested that student perceptions of the relationship were accurate. In both the rural schools in Western

Australia and Colorado, the students and teachers acknowledged that they had built friendships beyond the classroom. Teachers in rural areas or small urban communities where teachers and students inevitably interact outside the classroom might have more natural opportunities to build mature friendships. Regardless of how the student-teacher relationships evolved, the interactions I observed were grounded in the very real complexities of human experience navigated successfully by students and teachers because the teachers took their role as primary carer seriously and interacted with students accordingly (Thompson, 2003). Whether or not the relationships evolved into friendships, when the students had the same art teacher for more than one semester, year, or even two years, they grew closer. Noddings (1992) labels this phenomenon continuity of care, an important feature within care theory for culturally diverse learners as well (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999).

*Care for the inner circle – unequal relations – child/parent.*

Noddings (1992) mentions the child-parent relationship in her listing of unequal relations but does not go on to describe the importance and impact of this relationship as it relates to schooling. Care theory for culturally diverse learners more directly addresses the issue and espouses the importance of attending to parents and the parent-child relationship (Salazar, 2008; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 1999). During my study, the ways in which students brought art into their homes and the subsequent effect on how parents perceived and interacted with their children dramatically impacted students in positive ways. I also observed how several students needed to rely on their caring teachers when they had difficulties at home or felt unable to turn to their parents for support. In addition,



teachers told me a number of stories about students' relationships with their parents; some inspiring for the level of support the parents provided, others tragic when they were about a parent who had died or struggled to provide the level of care their child needed. These stories formed a clear picture of the great extent to which the parent-child relationship affects what happens in the classroom.

I want to focus on the importance of family in the students' lives and how their visual arts classes gave them an opportunity to reflect on and show care for their families. So often teachers, especially at the secondary level, want to shut out students' families and force students to separate and individuate. This approach reflects a cultural and gender bias steeped in traditional school culture (Thompson, 2003). I found that allowing family to play a role enhanced teacher efforts and student holistic development. The teachers all expressed that their own families were hugely important to them, and I believe this factor influenced their willingness to be more inclusive (Uhrmacher, 1997). At the same time, when I shared some of the stories about how students were connecting with their families because of art, the teachers were amazed.

Students spoke warmly about the impact of the artistic process and final products on their relationships with their parents. In regard to the artistic process, students valued when their parents supported them by buying supplies, talking with them about their ideas, or marveling about their work. All of the students shared that their families saw them differently because of the work they'd done, and that their parents displayed their pieces with pride. Every student talked about using family members as models, and several students included pictures of family members in their photo essays. This

connection has important curricular and pedagogical implications. Care theory for culturally diverse learners strongly argues for honoring and including students' families in their educations (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Salazar, 2008). My study further supports recommendations that teachers acknowledge the existing role of families in students' visual arts experiences and create opportunities for purposeful engagement (Stephenson & Deasy, 2005). Some examples of existing parental involvement that can be reinforced are supporting students by creating art spaces in the home and if possible purchasing art supplies, attending art shows, teaching a class on areas of expertise, or helping out in the classroom. Parents also often helped teachers understand their students if they struggled in class and worked together to find solutions. Additionally, as parents witnessed their students growing as artists, it amazed and often helped them see and appreciate their child's burgeoning maturity. I cannot overstate the importance of family in shaping and informing the artistic life, and subsequently overall sense of self, for their students. The teachers in the study understood the importance of family and allowed for seamless integration within the curricular and pedagogical dimensions.

***Other centers of care.***

The three remaining centers of care that stood out in the study are care for plants, animals, and the Earth; care for the human made world; and care for ideas. I have chosen to focus only briefly on these centers of care in an effort to not detract from the greater importance of the interpersonal forms of care described above. I include some discussion here because the visual arts teachers engaged students in caring behaviors in these areas in important ways; I also hope that future researchers, especially those interested in the

role of visual arts in environmental education, will be able to draw upon these ideas for their work.

*Care for animals, plants, and the Earth.*

Noddings (1992) believes that students should participate in activities that engage them with the natural world in order to develop an intimate connection to nature and subsequent understanding of the Earth's fragility. The ultimate goal is to have students act in personally responsible ways and to hopefully spur them to political action. She references pedagogy of the oppressed and the oppressor to raise student awareness of the impact of their actions on the environment and other people, also significant for care theory for culturally diverse learners (Freire as cited in Flinders & Thornton, 2004).

The teachers in the study either developed specific lessons to teach about environmental issues or had open-ended assignments that allowed students to pursue their own interests in this area. In addition to this explicit curriculum, the teachers did little things that reflected the importance of moderation, conservation, and reuse (Hutchison, 1998; Noddings, 1992). The teachers made sure students had plenty of supplies with which to work but urged them to use them wisely, not just for budget concerns but for environmental awareness. They also modeled behaviors associated with this center of care in other ways, for example: making found objects sculptures that initiated conversations about recycling and waste; collecting gray water from the tap to water a garden; having students make conceptual pieces using waste materials for three dimensional sculptures; plugging clay for reuse; making altered books from discarded books and scrap materials; and more. The environments formed by the teachers were ripe

for raising awareness of and action on these issues. Although the physical buildings in which the teachers worked did not always lend themselves easily to connecting students with the natural world, teachers worked to overcome these barriers. By giving students the freedom to go outside and participate on fieldtrips, in addition to integrating nature in their assignments on their own, the teachers hoped their students would “come to know and love the land around them, ultimately making daily and lifelong choices that serve to steward the planet” (Upitis, 2007, p. 2).

*Care for the human made world.*

Care for the human made world as envisioned by Noddings (1992) comes through in full force within the visual arts classrooms observed. Students learned about the proper use of objects, as well as an historical context for their use. They also learned that: when everything has a place, a facilitative order, the flow of activities and learning opportunities increased (Upitis, 2007); the placement of objects and arrangement of a room can help you feel good and be more productive; the human made (as well as natural) objects and materials with which you decorate influence the feeling of a space and your creativity; it’s critical for everyone to contribute to the maintenance and care of materials when in a communal setting (and that they should do the same individually at home); and repairing and maintaining equipment is important to reduce waste and ensure that everyone has what they need for the job at hand. Care theory for culturally diverse learners advocates this type of care and emphasizes the importance of teachers establishing “an expectation and responsibility to help each other” (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004). As you read in the care for the inner circle discussion, care for materials ultimately

taught students ways to care for each other. Teachers consciously attended to helping students develop awareness for these care issues within their classrooms and modeled care for human made things by fixing equipment versus discarding it and buying something new (Hutchison, 1998).

*Care for ideas.*

Noddings (1992) strongly supports the value of students studying a topic simply because they show a passion and genuine interest. Part of her motivation is to help students actively participate in their learning and thrive in areas for which they show a passion, regardless of whether or not the information helps them pass a test. The type of arts education she recommends for this purpose reflects exactly what students experienced in the classrooms studied: settings that provide opportunities for exploration, discovery and individual expression, and that emphasize the importance of “doing” art, versus simply learning about the work of others or art theory. She also argues that these broader goals need to be rooted in skill development and may benefit from addressing the work of other artists, past and present. For Dewey (1934), “Art denotes a process of doing or making. This is as true of fine art and technological art... So marked is the active ‘doing’ phase of art that the dictionaries usually define it in terms of skilled action, ability in execution” (p. 48). With all aspects of “doing,” classroom experiences should afford students the opportunity to strive for excellence and rigor, which they did in the classes studied. Nieto (1999) and others support this notion of pushing all students for excellence because “great potential exists in all students” and teachers must trust “that bicultural students are capable and worthy” in order for students to excel (p. 173). Noddings (1992)

believes that reaching for the highest standard in an area of passion shapes students' minds; Eisner (2002) echoes these sentiments as do other experts on creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Moran & John-Steiner, 2003; Sternberg, 2003)

Students told me over and over how art gave school meaning for them, whether or not they were doing well academically. It gave them a sense of purpose and belonging, and helped them see a side of themselves that went missing in other environments. Making art for themselves or others, having their pieces displayed in various art shows, and completing art projects for the communities in which they lived helped them embrace this important aspect of their humanity. Rigorous standards drove them to excel, as indicated by scores on external examinations and the number of awards earned at local and state juried competitions. Their descriptions mirrored findings on flow theory which emphasizes the "symbiotic relationship between challenges and skills needed to meet those challenges" (Shernoff et al., 2003).

### **Creative environments and Question Three: Creative risk taking.**

The teachers' intentions reflect key elements advocated in the literature on creativity; and they effectively realized these intentions in the classroom. The case studies and student thoughts presented thus far demonstrate how the learning environments were steeped in the creative process. An examination of the curricular, pedagogical, evaluative, and aesthetic dimensions will help us see how teachers were able to enhance student creativity and willingness to take creative risks.

After an examination of the literature, I identified four teacher behaviors shown to enhance creativity and used them to guide my research and analysis: 1) helping students

challenge assumptions and look at things in different ways; 2) encouraging student confidence to take risks; 3) nurturing a passion for exploration; and 4) setting creativity as a curricular priority (Sternberg, 2003). Not only did the teachers' do all of these things in their direct interactions with the students, but they also built creative communities in which students took it upon themselves to engage in similar behaviors for each other. In addressing if teachers realized their intentions in this dimension, I will also answer Question Three: *How does the enacted curriculum (the ideas, activities and actions created by teacher and students) affect students' willingness to take creative risks?* I answer this question as I attend to the other dimensions of creativity, since each contributed in its own way to creative risk taking on the part of the students.

***Challenge assumptions and look at things in different ways.***

Experts on creativity and the development thereof disagree on many things, but they all agree that at some level creativity means fashioning something novel out of the cultural and social influences impacting the individual. Dewey (1934) expresses this idea when he writes:

Yet what is evoked is transformation of energy into thoughtful action, through assimilation of meanings from the background of past experiences. The junction of the new and old is not a mere composition of forces, but is a re-creation in which the present impulsion gets form and solidity while the old, the "stored," material is literally revived, given new life and soul through having to meet a new situation. (p. 63)

Robinson (2001) also addresses the dynamic relationship between external and internal influences on creativity by noting that, "Original ideas do come from the inspirations of individual minds. But creativity is rarely if ever an isolated process. There is a powerful cultural dimension...Creativity draws from networks of knowledge and ideas" (p. 166).

Herein lies the role of challenging assumptions and looking at things in different ways: to create something novel and unexpected, to go for surprise, one must draw upon but then go beyond what has come before. Eisner (2002) writes that:

To pursue surprise requires the willingness to take risks, for while surprise itself may emerge, its pursuit is a choice. In choosing to pursue surprise one selects an uncertain path, and it is here that familiar schema and customary techniques may prove ineffective. (p. 79)

The teachers in the study empowered students to take risks and pursue uncertain paths. Establishing a caring community helped students feel comfortable to do so, but comfort alone would not have been sufficient (Gude, 2010). The teachers consciously helped students challenge assumptions to develop a “willingness to reconsider what [they] take for granted” (Robinson, 2001, p. 137).

Perhaps the most significant curricular decision made by all of the teachers to encourage risk-taking was to design open-ended assignments. Gude (2010) argues that to stimulate creativity, teachers need to first teach skills but then allow students the opportunity to use them as they see fit through more open-ended projects, because “a student’s experience of focused experimentation is interrupted when strictures such as ‘demonstrate cross-hatching in your finished work’ or ‘you must use cool colors in the background and warm colors in the foreground’ impinge on a student’s intuitive choice-making” (p. 36). Students in the study acknowledged that in other art classes they frequently felt like they had to make what the teacher wanted and could not try new things. One of Ms. Carter’s ceramics students, concurrently in a drawing and painting class, expressed frustration with that teacher because she is “very specific and you have to do what she says.” The teachers provided students guidance through a framework



and/or concepts that had to be addressed, but beyond that, students had great freedom. This openness of the assignments helped students realize that “in the arts children, like adults, can pursue whimsy if they wish – the man’s hair can be blue; they can tell it like they want it to be” (Eisner, 2002, p. 83). Numerous examples of students challenging assumptions and looking at things in different ways stemmed from the open-ended nature of the assignments.

One of Ms. Madison’s students painted the front half of a fish on one corner of a platter she made and the rear half on another. She shared that she made this decision specifically to differentiate herself from her peers and be unique. Whether making a painting three-dimensional with sand and wire, pondering that Michael and Lucifer must have once been friends, painting a self-portrait from above, or devising a technique encouraging paint to drip versus avoiding drips, students continually evoked a sense of surprise and their willingness to take risks enabled them to do so. Students were “generating something original: providing an alternative to the conventional or routine...to expand the possibilities of a situation, to look at it from a new perspective” (Robinson, 2001, p. 133).

Not all of the surprises were whimsical. Both care and creativity theorists promote the value of teaching students to challenge the way things are, in general and through art in particular, a value supported by the teachers in the study and enacted within the curriculum (Salazar, 2008; Gay, 2000; Gude, 2010; Pink, 2006; Nieto, 1999). Ms. Carter, Ms. Wright, and Ms. Scott each had lessons in which they asked students to examine taken-for-granted realities that affect human kind and the environment. Mr. Cole’s

assignments encouraged students to examine cultural and social justice issues in their lives. His curricular decisions showed that he understood the importance of their stories.

Greene (1995) espouses the value of this type of teaching:

To help diverse students we know articulate their stories is not only to help them pursue the meanings of their lives – to find out *how* things are happening and to keep posing questions about the why. It is to move them...to be fully participant in this society, and to do so without losing the consciousness of who they are. (p.165)

Students did not have to stay with safe, sanitary topics. They could challenge and reconfigure the status quo.

***Nurture a passion for exploration.***

Another important category of creative behaviors cluster under the notion of nurturing a passion for exploration; that teachers need to foster a sense of “eager curiosity about the world” (Nakamura, 2003, p. 225), a trait characteristic of renowned artists and scientists and one that experts in various fields fear is being lost as children are no longer as free to indulge their curiosity. Nakamura (2003) argues that it is important to identify conditions under which formal schooling can spark curiosity, and the findings from my study indicate that the right visual arts environments alone, or integrated with other content areas (such as in Ms. Madison’s class) are a powerful catalyst for doing so.

A helpful model to use when examining how teachers nurtured a passion for exploration is Uhrmacher’s (2009) theory of aesthetic learning experiences. Uhrmacher argues that aesthetic learning allows students to have “powerful experiences,” which I believe are essential for students to achieve the level of passion necessary to spark curiosity. The six aesthetic themes that combine to create this spark are: *connections*,

*active engagement, sensory experiences, perceptivity, risk taking, and imagination* (Uhrmacher, 2009).

Making *connections* refers to the way in which students connect with an idea, whether emotionally or intellectually, with *active engagement* being the ideal way to make a connection. In the study, all of the teachers developed lessons to help students make connections actively with the various media or concepts. For example, when wanting to reinforce color theory and painting, Ms. Meyer's did so through graffiti art, an important media for the students at her school. Ms. Carter connected students to ceramics methods by engaging their emotions, cultures, and relationships. Mr. Cole allowed his students to bring in culture, religion, emotions, personal stories, or love for a medium within all of his lessons. As a result the students paid close attention when the teachers presented skill development lessons, and in fact explored different uses with the materials in order to communicate their personal insights. They engaged cognitively and physically in active ways to make connections which fueled a desire to know more, reflective of Uhrmacher's (2009) notion of active engagement.

Inherent in the first two themes is *sensory experience*, the "idea that one's senses are alive and heightened during an aesthetic experience" (Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2009, p. 92). The teachers allowed students to experience a wide variety of sensory experiences. Visually they provided students opportunities to see the work of other artists, the transformation of glazes during firing, and the shimmer of light on the ocean. Auditory experiences included listening to Billie Holliday, the sound of feet on crunching snow, and the laughter of classmates. Tactilely, students felt the scratchy texture of canvas

against the bristles of their paintbrush, the slippery wetness while shaping clay on the wheel, and the stiffness of wire juxtaposed with soft fabric. They introduced students to the smell of turpentine, acrylic paint, and photographic chemicals. Kinesthetically, students learned that they could use their bodies in different ways, such as standing to paint a life-sized canvas or dancing to dab paint first a little here, then a little there. As they engaged more with their senses they asked how they might do something differently, “What would happen if?”

Uhrmacher (2009) posits that a critical aspect of the aesthetic experience, made possible in part from the first three themes, is *perceptivity*, for which one must “really look, take in the qualities” (p. 624) of an object. The section on spirituality goes into this notion of perceptivity in depth in that students looked at the world more intently, that they truly perceived because of their teacher’s influence. Perceptivity as evinced in my study shows that engagement leads to perceptivity which in turn leads to deeper engagement.

A desire to know more grew out of greater awareness because the effect of perceptivity was so reinforcing for the students. This in turn frequently led to *risk taking*, or “a venture into the unknown” (p. 624). I’ve talked about the connection between the caring environment and willingness to take risks, but having something to explore and learn about in more depth is imperative as well. It brings us to the “What if?” questions students asked: What if I dripped paint down the full length of the canvas? What if I do the same thing after adding a thinner? What if I painted my self-portrait from above versus straight on? What if I used a child to portray the concept of sin instead of an adult?

What if I explored the texture and beauty of skin? None of the students knew the outcome but put themselves out there and explored the possibilities. In addressing Uhrmacher's point about risk in appreciating art, students did take risks by offering up different interpretations, ideas, and feelings that the same piece of art evoked for each of them. Integral to risk taking was first having the ability, freedom, and desire to imagine other possibilities. A great deal is written on *imagination* (Greene, 1995; Moran & John-Steiner, 2003; Sawyer, 2003; Sternberg, 2003), but Uhrmacher (2009) focuses on what he labels the *intuitive* imagination, "experiences in which a person feels as though he or she is a conduit for a work of art to express itself" (p. 625), whether coming from the cosmos or the subconscious. Gude (2010) concurs with this connection between psyche and imagination. One of Ms. Carter's students expressed this idea wonderfully when he talked about other students calling him the "wheel whisperer" because he was one with the clay and let the form develop from this connection. One of Ms. Scott's students expressed this same sense of connecting to something outside oneself when working imaginatively:

It's somebody else. It's not quite us. It's not our conscious. It's not our subconscious, but it's like your alter ego, I guess. And this alter ego goes around and it gathers things from other people's alter egos, and it collects them and then distorts them, and then sends it to the front of our brains where we use it, and then we establish the basis of what we would call creativity from that. I think if everyone in the entire world was gone, we would find something living to take that from. It's like even if you look at a blank wall, there's something there, other than a blank wall. There's the things inside the blank wall. It's like, "What created the blank wall?" So we get our own creativity from things that exist.

Another form is *interactive* imagination in which the creator "tries things out. She takes risks. Sometimes the ideas work and sometimes they do not" (Uhrmacher, 2009, p. 626). When students set out to find the answers to their "What if?" questions they were

engaged in this type of imaginative process. The combination of all of these themes nurtured student passion for exploration.

Also integral to their willingness to explore was the curricular and pedagogical decision that mistakes are opportunities. All of the teachers and students interviewed, as well as most of the students observed during class, took advantage of mistakes, a strategy strongly supported in the literature (Eisner, 2002; Pink, 2006; Robinson, 2001; Sternberg, 2003). Sometimes students would get disheartened, but the way in which the teachers assisted them as they dealt with mistakes helped students move forward. Sometimes teachers simply told them not to erase a draft they didn't like, but to work with it instead and see where it led them; other times they had them glue shards together in patterns divergent from the original to access a new concept. Whatever the method, students learned that perfection often inhibited potential and mistakes could release new ideas. Additionally, getting messy, often seen as a mistake, opened up opportunities. Teachers encouraged students to not hold back when working with materials, whether wet clay on the wheel or paint dripping to the ground. They had systems in place for cleaning, as you read earlier, which helped students feel free to get messy as they explored new techniques and materials. Although a seemingly simple pedagogical choice, allowing students to make mistakes and get messy profoundly impacted their passion for creative exploration.

***Set creativity as a curricular priority.***

The teachers in the study consciously made decisions that set creativity as a curricular priority. They were aware of the hazards that dampen creativity, such as tests that value memorization and correct answers, and consciously provided “a smaller reward

for conceptual replications than for bolder redirections” (Sternberg, 2003, p. 127). Within the evaluative dimension as well, teachers were sensitive to the idea that:

It is not enough to talk about the value of creativity; children are used to authority figures who say one thing and do another. They are exquisitely sensitive to what teachers value when it comes to the bottom line – namely the grade or evaluation. (Sternberg, 2003, p. 127)

When faced with more restrictive outside curricular mandates such as the Tertiary and Advanced Placement examinations, the teachers put forth extra effort to help students find their voices. This attention to voice allowed students to “use their imaginative capacities to conceive of possibilities that are distinctive to themselves...[to] invite the application of a personal thumbprint upon one’s work” (Eisner, 2002, p. 235).

One of the most important curricular decisions teachers made was that students did not all have to make the same thing; in fact teachers openly discouraged this type of art production. Students frequently started with the same materials and ended up with completely unique products. Whenever students had opportunities to experiment with several different materials and methods, brainstorm with teachers and fellow students, and explore varied strategies to solve problems, they enhanced their creativity and mental capabilities (Eisner, 2000; Robinson, 2001; Sternberg, 2003). This type of instruction not only facilitates creative thinking, it scaffolds students for success and validates their unique ways of seeing the world (Nieto, 1999). It might be especially important in the arts. Florida (2002), in his study of people who gravitate to creative endeavors and identify themselves as creative, found that such people have “a strong desire for organizations and environments that let them be creative – that value their input, challenge them, have mechanisms for mobilizing resources around ideas and are

receptive to both small changes and the occasional big idea” (p. 40). Sternberg (2003) also writes about the importance of environment because “one could have all of the internal resources needed in order to think creatively, but without some environmental support,...the creativity that person has within him or her might never be displayed” (p. 97). The teachers created such environments in their classrooms and the students responded positively.

All of the teachers nurtured student creativity and taught how to look at things in different ways but could have employed additional techniques to improve their effectiveness. Gude (2010) draws upon the work of Carl Rogers and outlines ways in which teachers can help students tap into the creativity of the unconscious mind, and I refer readers to her article to learn about the process in more depth. Creativity exercises advocated for the business world could also easily be adapted and modified to work within the classroom (Pink, 2006; Reynolds, 2006; Robinson, 2001; von Oech, 1998).

I refer back to Uhrmacher’s (2009) aesthetic theme of sensory experiences to tap into another way to support creative exploration. The teachers relied on visual and tactile processing as the dominant modes of inquiry and creation. Consciously developing creativity exercises that ask students to use all of their other senses, including kinesthetic, olfactory, gustatory, and auditory could enhance teacher and student efforts. I frequently saw students sitting around thinking, and when I talked to them, they shared that they were stuck, trying to get an idea. Having a resource box of different objects to touch or smell, unique or unusual types of music to listen to, or varied foods or other items to



smell could help students connect to different, non-visual memories and emotions thereby facilitating their creative processes (Gude, 2010; Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2009).

#### **Question Four: How Students See Themselves**

The students in the study expressed that they were transformed through their creative enterprises and shared moving stories reflecting how their work shaped their identities. Based on the interviews and observations, I identified and labeled three dominant themes of self-concept which help frame an understanding of how students see themselves as a result of the creative and caring art environments studied. All three themes are supported by development theory as described in the literature review and reflect a holistic sense of self (Dewey, 1909; Eisner, 2002; Gay, 2000; Hausman, 2010; NACCE, 1999; Nieto, 1999; Pink, 2006; Robinson, 2001; Salazar, 2008). First, their comments reveal that students are *relational beings* who influence and are influenced by people in their lives. Second, students are *creative and capable beings* who define themselves through mental and physical aspects of creativity and art production. Third, students see themselves as *unique beings* as revealed through their art.

To answer Question Four: “*How do the intentions and practices of the teacher impact student self-concepts?*” I will use the students’ own words and images to inform our understanding of the three themes of self-concept. I hope to encourage researchers, teachers, parents, and other adults to learn from the students’ images and thoughts so they can begin a dialogue (as envisioned by Freire) with the students in their lives.

### **Relational beings.**

All of the student participants revealed that their artwork helped them connect to other people which in turn shaped how they saw themselves. Most also talked about how their experience in the art class motivated them to help other people because they either wanted to share the positive feelings they felt with others or were confident to teach others as they were taught. Although they expressed that they frequently enjoyed working alone, sharing their art with others gave it meaning and in turn strengthened their self-concept. The following quotations, some with related photos, capture their feelings best:

I like helping people. It gives me a [sense of] self-fulfillment. When I help someone it kinda makes me feel like if I'm having a bad day and I can help them out and talk to them and I'm like, "Oh, my day's not going so bad anymore."  
~Anna, Ms. Carter's class

Well, people do call me the Clay Whisper and the Wheel Whisperer because, there have been days when Ms. Conrad is not in the classroom, she got sick, or there's a sub there, and people will be on the wheel, and if they have a question or they're having trouble, they come to me and they're like, "Oh, can you help me do this." Most days, if I'm really busy, I'm like, "Hold on a bit. I have to do this." But most days I'm just like, "Oh yeah, sure. I'll be right over there."  
~Wes, Ms. Carter's class



My family notices that I'm interested in art and, whether I pursue it or not, it's really a passion for me. ~Aaron, Ms. Wright's class

*Figure 40. A view from above (Aaron)*

My parents have always supported me with whatever I've done. They've always backed me up and they can appreciate what I'm doing in art. I can tell they're sincere and they're not just like, "Oh, that's nice, not really, but." My grandma on my dad's side is very artistic also. She does quilts and stuff and she does all sorts of arts and crafts so she can really appreciate it. And then my grandpa on that side really likes guitar and so they both support me... They've been extremely supportive as well as my parents. ~Micah, Ms. Carter's class



There's my dad. And my dad always gives me a hard time with my art work, but he's always like, "Oh, really, I can't believe you made that." And it was so funny, 'cause everything I've ever brought home, he's like, "You can do better." He's just kidding, and I love it. I actually brought a mug home and he goes, "Oh, that's really good." And I was like, "Wait. What? You're not giving me a hard time about this one?" And he's like, "No, it's really good." And I was like, "Thanks." ~Kira, Ms. Carter's class

*Figure 41. A father's mug (Kira)*

Most of my motivation comes from my mom. She's always supporting me and always bringing me, she's always making me look at the bright things. She's always on my side; she always makes me feel good about what I do. And, she's a great support, and since most of my drawings come from my culture, sometimes I think of my mom and my drawings reflect like a lot of how much important she is in what I do. She's important to me. ~Federico, Mr. Cole's class

I tried to teach my brother how to paint as well, and I tried to mirror [my teacher] in teaching him. It was amazing to teach my brother how to paint such an amazing piece. ~Elizabeth, Ms. Wright's class

Friends have a lot to do with this stuff, you know, they help you a lot. If you have a question about something, or you don't exactly know what to take a picture of, you know they can help you and give you ideas. ~Nina, Mr. Cole's class



*Figure 42. An inspirational brother (Nina)*

I wanted a picture of my brother because he's the one that helps me a lot. And then he tells me, "Oh this picture's so beautiful," or "This looks so sweet," or you know whatever. And so I think he's one of the people that helps me a lot.  
~Nina, Mr. Cole's class



*Figure 43. A little brother's hand (Maya)*

I wasn't really expecting a little brother; it was just something that happened. My mom, when she told me he was coming, it was weird. It's been like another experience, I've become like his mom because, most of the time, I'm always with him, taking care of him. My mom just needs me. I feel more responsible. ~Maya, Mr. Cole's class

With my family, it has brought us to do more stuff together; because they look at my art and then they have opinions. I even have it on my "My Space" and people comment; it just kind of gives me other sources of communication with other people so they can see what I do. It's nice because everybody, always, from the first time they meet me they're like, "Oh, you should play basketball." So, it just shows them what I *really* do. It's all good. ~Daniel, Mr. Cole's class

People see artwork and they say, "Oh, that's pretty cool." And then they find out I'm a friend that can do it. And they're just like, "I want you to draw me something." It's kinda like special to them, I guess. Instead of just buying it, 'cause they know a friend made it for them. ~Marc, Ms. Scott's class



This picture is of two trees; the one tree is leaning over as if it needs support to stand. Sometimes people need someone to lean on also. ~Trace, Ms. Scott's class

*Figure 44. "Sometimes people need someone to lean on also." (Trace)*

### **Creative and capable beings.**

In addition to defining themselves in and through relations with others, students came to see themselves as creative and capable beings. Their hands were no longer just an appendage, but a powerful tool for interacting with the world; their eyes no longer simply helped them navigate obstacles but connected them intimately with the world around them. Because of their teachers, the students felt confident to use their imaginations and fashion raw materials into something special, something new. They saw themselves and the world around them differently as a result of their experiences and valued their growth.

A lot of being able to recognize what you're doing, just really comes from looking at yourself, trying to figure out what you've done to make certain things happen so you can move forward with it. ~Anna, Ms. Carter's class

Learning, learning about art, it inspires you to look more; I look differently at the world, more things inspire me now. ~Kristin, Ms. Meyers' class



I realized just how much stuff my hands can do. It's like if I lost my hands I probably would not be very happy because I realize now that I use them for everything, including making incredible stuff. ~Erin, Ms. Wright's class

*Figure 45. Hands with which to make "incredible stuff" (Erin)*

I take every aspect of my life and kind of use it to build all these other ones. So I just kind of grow not only in art, but as a person. ~Micah, Ms. Carter's class

Overall, there's lots of people that you could tell that they love art. It really helps them get through life sometimes, and I feel that way too. Sometimes when you're working with art it really helps you and, I don't know, it just makes me feel better. ~Kira, Ms. Carter's class



I appreciate detail more than I did before now. Yeah, so I guess that will be a part of my life. Mainly it's like I'm seeing things now differently than I did before. That's one of the things most definitely that's changed about me. It's like every other part of my body now seems completely useless, because like what can I do with my knees? ~Erin, Ms. Wright's class

*Figure 46. Beauty in the small things (Erin)*

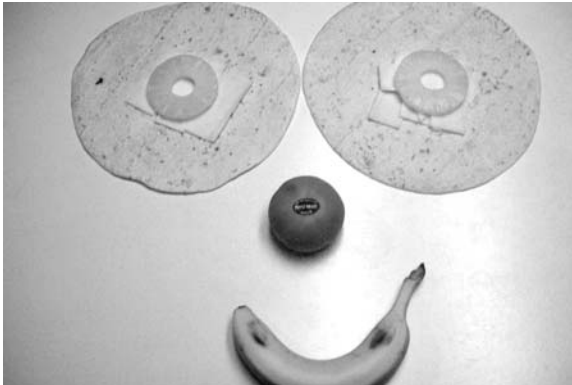
I would like more time for art; I would love to do art all the time. I would love a whole day of art, or something. (Really happy and laughing as she thinks about it) ~Sarah, Ms. Madison's class

I feel like I do try to live my life creatively...I use little words and little reminders; they're aspects of my life. ~Ariana, Ms. Scott's class



It's very special for me. If I didn't have art I'd be the very logical, kind of math and science person, a very detailed person. It gives me a different way to think, a different approach. ~Elizabeth, Ms. Wright's class

Figure 47. Art nook at home and self-portrait (Elizabeth)



My mom was making our lunches, and I got some fruit out of the fruit bowl. I stood on the chair to take the photo, 'cause it was on our kitchen bench. Just seeing the fruit, I was just sitting there and I thought, "That looks like a mouth," so I made it into a face. ~Tina, Ms. Madison's class

Figure 48. "Food face" – spontaneous creativity (Tina)

My sister, in middle school, she made this hand sculpture, and she said she got marked down 'cause the teacher wrote on her thing, "Hands aren't blue," 'cause she painted it all blue. And she said forever that has affected her. Now she's twenty-two. But, you know, it's just like one of those things. I wish I could take that away 'cause...I feel like Ms. Scott says things that help me and I feel so fortunate that I have been in an environment that can be supportive of art and never really restricted to closed minded ideas. ~Ariana, Ms. Scott's class

I think the reason why we draw pictures or take pictures is because we transform it. I think that every picture we take we should learn a little bit from it. ~Dana, Mr. Cole's class

### Unique beings.

Although people intuitively know they are unique, society often tries to mask and cover this sense of self. The opportunity for students to examine who they are and what they care about through their artwork in these caring and creative art classes helped them uncover who they are and begin to shape their awareness of what made them special and unique. The sheer diversity of the artwork in each class attests to different ideas, skills, and modes of expression. Rooted in and going beyond art production, however, is a firm sense of self shaped by the art teachers and the creative processes they used to guide their students.

I think her biggest goal for us is just, like I said before, to discover yourself. She might say, “Okay, our goal is for you to make a painting that gets a point across.” But, really, your point is to find out yourself, because the point that you’re gonna choose is gonna kind of lead into parts of your personality and parts of your life. Why did you choose this project? Well, because my home life is really crappy, or



because I feel that people in Africa should eat, or because I feel like we’re making too much waste products. Why do you feel that way? Well, because we take out three bags of garbage every day, you know? It leads back into your own situation. And I think that’s her goal, to get students to discover themselves so that they’re ready to be out on their own.  
~Kacy, Ms. Scott’s class

*Figure 49. Unique way of looking at the world (Kacy)*

You know, I think I would ultimately be a different person, you know, like in my room, all the things, the way I dress, like, I think I would be totally different because it’s all really art inspired. ~Ariana, Ms. Scott’s class

Art makes me feel like a special person. ~Janna, Ms. Madison’s class

I just, well, I just think that taking pictures or drawing, it’s like we’re writing our own books. That’s just how we are, or who we are. ~Nina, Mr. Cole’s class



(This student was speaking about a poster he made for the school play) I feel maybe it's not the biggest play ever, but I feel like one in a million that I got to be picked to do something like that and have it hung up in the whole school. Just walking by seeing my own artwork hanged up all over the school made me feel so good about myself. ~Federico, Mr. Cole's class



*Figure 50. Uniqueness (Trace)*

This tree kind of resembles me. It's one of a kind and so am I. ~Trace, Ms. Scott's class



*Figure 51. Creative identity (Maya)*

This is a picture of my eye; I'm experimenting. Most people don't really get that creative, and they don't really experiment with pictures that much. ~Maya, Mr. Cole's class

Sense of worth...if you don't think you're worthy, then you couldn't think that what you made was worthy. So I think the first step to really starting to know yourself and your artistic aspirations is to know your worth. And then from knowing your worth you get other things and other places, like relationships. You can't get into a relationship without first knowing yourself, can you? You drown yourself in other people's worth before you finally figure out how to swim in your own. ~Kacy, Ms. Scott's class

## **Importance Within and Beyond Visual Arts Education: Thoughts and**

### **Recommendations**

Florida (2002) helps us see the importance of creative experience through a story told by Adam Smith after visiting a pin factory:

The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations...has no occasion to exert his understanding or to exercise his innovation...He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment. (p. 40)

Having the opportunity to engage in a wholly human endeavor informs one's humanity and identity, and glaring weaknesses occur when not able to do so. The story points out that people are "part of a complex social system" (Sawyer, 2003, p. 7) which may help or hinder their development.

Students find themselves impacted by social expectations that often interfere with creative development. Throughout the study, many of the teachers and students lamented the overemphasis on math and science courses. Students said parents and post-secondary schooling requirements put pressure on them to quit art, and that they had to battle against this pressure. Along these lines, teachers said they frequently lost gifted students who flourished and excelled in their classes but felt forced to strengthen their résumés in core academic areas. Both teachers and students also shared that budget cuts hit their visual arts programs before core academics. A competition reigns between these different disciplines which ultimately skews what really matters: taking care of students.

Care theory, as applied to all students, coupled with elements of care identified as essential for culturally diverse learners, offers a new lens with which to examine how to

best meet student needs. Learning environments that enliven and expect the best of students, help them develop as autonomous and creative learners, provide them opportunities to care for others and the world around them, and keep them connected to their schools and education should be the standard against which we measure success, regardless of content area. The visual arts teachers studied met these expectations by attending to the whole student, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. For the students observed in the study, without such environments their lives, academically and holistically, would be pale shadows devoid of their current richness; they would feel like the pin workers in the factory. To reduce the frequency with which students endure this fate I offer some recommendations to teachers, teacher educators, students, parents and/or significant others, administrators, researchers, and policy makers based on my observations and analysis.

### **Teachers.**

You are the driving force behind the positive outcomes described and felt by the students. Carefully examine your teaching and determine how you contribute to or detract from creating caring and creative experiences for your students, whether in the visual arts or other content areas. Find a central person, or core group of people, whom you can enlist to help you with all the amazing things you can and should do with your students. Parents and others in the community have a great deal to offer, whether helping clean the art room at the end of each year, running the kiln over the weekend, teaching on areas of expertise, getting supplies from the community, facilitating volunteer efforts, or completing any other of the endless tasks with which you need assistance. The ultimate

goal is to help you take care of yourself, which gives you more energy and strength to be there for your students.

With the students, consciously and purposefully build community; by doing so you give them opportunities to feel safe asking each other for help and to work together creatively. Students should know each other's names, interests, and strengths; they should celebrate victories and support each other through challenges (whether related to art or not). Not all students will bond and connect to you or each other, but even these students will achieve greater success. Those who do connect will find the experience life changing and formational. For the group, establish systems for how to care for the materials as a collective responsibility, supported by each individual, to make life easier and to teach the importance of caring for each other and the human made world.

Instructionally, assess how well you scaffold student learning in the areas of skill development, creativity, and conceptual thinking; without practice in *each* of these areas, students do not have the tools with which to best express their ideas and talents. Develop open-ended lessons that allow them to bring in their cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, and voice, while at the same time showcasing their skills. I encourage you to use the framework of this paper to appraise your instruction to highlight strengths and attend to deficiencies. Some of the caring and creative strategies described and recommended may go against long-held biases and values that put teachers in dominant and/or prohibitive roles. I encourage you to question why "hands aren't blue," and carefully examine assumptions that inhibit and hurt students (Uhrmacher, 1997).

For teachers in other content areas, carefully assess what it means for students to sit in your class each day. What opportunities do they have to truly problem-solve versus simply provide right answers; to get messy and explore; to move around and converse with their peers; to contribute to a community of learners with their ideas; to be inspired by the classroom setting versus staring at blank walls? A few students mentioned how their English teachers inspired them to write creatively and find their own voice; how can you expand this reach? One student mentioned that her Spanish class had an invigorating aesthetic feel that motivated her to learn; unfortunately, all of the other students described their classrooms as boring, drab, and uninspiring. The lack of trust and restrictions on movement further inhibited students' connections to their learning and deadened their minds in these settings. How can you build learning communities based on trust and communication? How can you earn your students' trust and ensure that they are learning and excited to come to class each day? The descriptions and analysis offered in this paper help you see how the teachers in this study shaped caring and creative learning environments; you can draw upon their efforts to guide your own. I leave you with final words of wisdom from one of the students participating in the study, "Watch your students. They might act like they're stupid sometimes and act like they don't care, but as soon as you get them and they think you're not looking, you'll see something great. It's true."

### **Teacher educators.**

All of the recommendations I've made to teachers apply to those of us who train new teachers or conduct ongoing development. I believe it is critical to help teachers

reflect on their attitudes and beliefs about control and the power differential between teachers and students. The students articulate quite eloquently that when teachers have issues around maintaining control through authoritarian means versus authoritative and democratic methods, they *do not learn* as effectively as they could and often suffer unnecessarily. How do you model shared control with your students? How do you maintain authority but allow your teacher candidates to participate in shared decision making and control over their own learning? If we do not model this type of interaction within our teacher education courses, we cannot expect that our students will do so once in their own classrooms. Additionally, what opportunities do you provide for creative expression, whether instructing teachers going into the arts or other content areas? Again, modeling is critical if we are to expect our students to engage in such behaviors when teaching. I hope you carefully read and perhaps re-read the students' comments and use what they say to inform your instruction and understanding of what they need from and value most in their teachers.

### **Students.**

If you have caring and creative teachers such as those described in this study, support them, ask how you can help, and let them know you value what they do. If you don't have such teachers, work with your classmates to support each other as much as possible in your creative endeavors. Perhaps you won't have the luxury of gathering in a special space created by your teacher, but maybe you can meet in another classroom, a local artist's studio, or someone's home. Immersing yourselves in a creative community will help you grow. Sometimes you might need to take action with your parents and other

adults to help develop a rich and rewarding arts program. Find support within your community or through organizations such as the Arts Education Partnership. Having arts education is worth fighting for and as young adults you might have to fight the fight.

**Parents and/or significant others.**

Your interest in and support of your children's visual arts and other creative endeavors mean more than you possibly realize. Whether you frame a picture and hang it on the wall, use a bowl to serve salsa, or attend an art show in which your student has a piece, your actions help your children feel special, successful, and motivated to continue developing this aspect of their lives. To ensure the best possible environments in which to do so, however, teachers could use your help in different ways, as mentioned in my recommendations for teachers. In addition to these efforts directly with your children's teachers, your school and district administrators need to hear how important visual arts are for your child and the community. Call, write letters, or attend meetings about budgets, curriculum decisions, scheduling, and more. Let decision-makers know that the arts keep your children engaged and further their cognitive, emotional, and personal development, and that without them many students are lost.

**Administrators.**

The notion that the arts compete with core academics is misguided and ill-informed at best. Visual arts experiences and opportunities for creative thinking and problem-solving stand on their own as a way to help students find personal and academic success, regardless of transference (although numerous studies indicate that the learning transfers) (Eisner, 2002; Pink, 2006; Robinson, 2001). For some students, the only reason

they come to school and stay in their other classes is to take art. An enriching visual arts program, such as those described in the study, adds value by helping students, but can also help schools stand out from the crowd in district, state, and even national competitions. Teachers who take visual arts programs to this level need your personal, academic, and financial support. During the study, one vice principal shared that he didn't get the whole art thing because he was a math and science and guy. In this school, several of the academically strong students commented that they had to fight to take art instead of more math and science. At another school, art adorned every hallway, conceptual sculptures decorated the courtyards, and the arts were everywhere. The students here talked about how these details made them feel valued. Your attitude makes a difference and ultimately affects how students connect to school and their learning.

Supporting visual arts program as a core belief serves as a good start, but the teachers who put so much into their programs need actual support. Whether it's finding members of the community to fund specific projects, enlisting a volunteer to write grants, or showcasing student work, the teachers need concrete actions to help them achieve their goals. Teachers find themselves completely immersed taking care of students and, although they would like to write grants and take other actions that would support their programs, they quite literally do not have the time, energy, or expertise to do so and need your help.

### **Researchers.**

In the literature on creativity and arts education, theorists and researchers dance around the word care. They advocate environments that support creativity or support risk



taking, but they don't show in detail what this type of support looks like and how to enlist student buy-in. Noddings' care theory allows us to understand the nuts-and-bolts of care and develop understandings that can inform practice. It enables us to look at students and learning environments in ways that focus on and value their complexity. Adding information from research with culturally diverse learners further strengthens Noddings' centers of care model and honors its foundational concepts, such as confirmation and dialogue (Noddings, personal communication, April 5, 2010). It allows us to remove our blinders and look more closely and accurately at the intricacies of student experiences. Just as the teachers in the study helped students notice the little details, so to do we need models that guide us in our research.

Examining Noddings' centers of care as implemented in visual arts classrooms in other cultures is a crucial next step. By studying urban, suburban, and rural schools in both the United States and Australia I was able to discern the impact of external factors on teachers' efforts. I was also able to provide a better informed understanding of caring and creative environments and their impact on students. However, both the United States and Australia are predominantly English-speaking, western, industrialized nations. Would the findings hold for schools in non-English speaking, western, industrialized nations? What about for schools in non-western, less- or non-industrialized settings? Research in a wider range of countries and cultures would expand and strengthen our understanding of caring and creative behaviors and their impact on learning. The students and teachers of tomorrow will live in increasingly interactive global communities and understanding how best to facilitate holistic development within this reality is imperative.

Further research is also needed to answer questions raised by this study. We saw that the teachers in the study exemplified best practices when teaching culturally diverse learners within the classroom. However, I did not examine if they empowered students to see themselves as agents for social justice. Some research on the visual arts and social justice exists, but not as connected to caring environments. Further research in this area could investigate how visual arts environments that are rooted in caring enhance critical pedagogy and teacher efforts to teach social justice. The high incidence of drop-out rates among minorities also supports looking closely at how caring and creative visual arts situations, such as those described in the study, might support student retention and success.

Environmental education researchers might probe the connection between visual arts classes and care for animals, plants, and the Earth and care for the human made world. The concepts of conservation, preservation, ecology, responsibility, and waste all materialized as central themes in the study which need further examination. Research on teacher education and ongoing teacher development would benefit from determining how to empower teachers to use caring in their instruction, whether in the arts or other academic areas. The positive impact these teachers had on students, coupled with student discussions on the negative impact of more restrictive teaching practices, deserves closer scrutiny.

Methodologically, researchers need to realize the power of visual imagery in tapping into metaphor and meaning. The students expressed that taking the photographs made them feel special and helped them think about things they took for granted, and

provided an opportunity to further connect with family and friends. As a researcher, I learned about the students and the role of art in their lives in ways that surpassed anything I could have achieved through narrative alone. Most importantly, I was able to see beyond the classroom and get a sense of the complex and dynamic ways in which art infused students' lives. The more we develop and embrace research methods that expand our view of people's experiences, versus narrowing and artificially restricting them, the better able we will be to understand what we see in order to improve educational experiences for everyone involved. Equally important to note was the impact I had on several of the teachers and they had on me. The teachers shared it meant so much to be able to talk with another adult who understood what they wanted to achieve with their students, observe their work, dialogue about the process, and even lend a helping hand when needed. In our role as researchers, how we interact with teachers can motivate, inspire, and affirm, when looking at best practices. Our role may also take on mentoring characteristics in more negative situations. Regardless, how we relate interpersonally with research participants has a profound effect. The aims of certain studies may preclude active researcher dialogue and participation; however, adhering to a model of giving to the community being researched, not only taking, forces us to realize we have something to offer and need to do so. We can be another positive influence in students' lives through our brief interactions, a fact reinforced for me through student comments during observations and interviews. We need to attend to these interpersonal connections and responsibilities, which can enhance how comfortable participants feel and subsequently what they are willing to share.

### **Policy makers.**

This section poses the greatest difficulty for me to write. I wish desperately to communicate what policy makers need most to hear from students but worry how to rise above the endless din on educational issues. What I therefore recommend first is that policy makers find a quiet time, some space to read what the students are telling us about the importance of visual arts education. They have the answers we need to address some of our most pressing educational concerns (in a cost-effective manner, no less). Firstly, in regards to drop-out rates, the students and teachers in the study shared that when students are connected to their visual arts teacher, classmates, and work, they are more likely to stay in school. This insight is not new but bears repeating over and over; in fact, Elliot Eisner, one of the preeminent scholars on visual arts education and a Stanford professor, writes that, “My interest in the visual arts began in elementary school. In fact the visual arts were a source of salvation for me at both the elementary and secondary school levels; I might not have got through without them” (Eisner, 2002, p. ix). When visual arts classes mirror the caring and creative traits described in this study, they make a difference in students’ lives. If teachers in other content areas could also find ways to integrate these lessons into their own instruction, students would benefit from even more places in which to connect to school. What’s significant to note is that high standards and expectations for excellence dominated. The classes provided challenges that students had to master. Flexibility was integral to this type of instruction and policy makers need to pay attention to this fact as they continue to move further and further away from flexibility and creativity into the realm of rigid and scripted instruction. Secondly, there is a push to

engage students in creative thinking and production in order to prepare them for an unknown future and financial stability. Caring and creative visual arts classrooms are a cost-effective way, already in place in most schools, to achieve these goals. We need to prevent the trend to eliminate funding for arts instruction in favor of core subjects; students need both to thrive. Enhancing what we do in the arts, in particular visual arts, in regards to practicing, engaging, and encouraging creative problem solving and the traits associated with creative actions and ideas, will help us compete with a global workforce. Several countries have already identified creativity as their number one curricular priority, such as China, and are fully funding efforts to realize their goals. Seeing the big picture of the role of caring and creative arts education is an increasing imperative.

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## **Appendix A: Dimensions of Secondary Visual Arts Classrooms**

*Below are the dimensions of secondary visual arts classrooms observed for this study. Beneath each dimension are the ways in which information was secured.*

### **Intentions: aims and goals**

Interviews with selected teachers

Collection of written documents (e.g., curriculum guidelines, class handouts)

### **School structure**

Observation of how time is used during each class period: amount of time spent on different types of activities

Observation of how space is used within each classroom: layout of the classroom, location of materials, location(s) of students

Observation of how time is used within the school as a whole and how that impacts the use of time in the visual arts classroom: length of day, length of periods, discretion of teacher in the use of time

Observation of how space is used within the school as a whole and how that impacts the use of space in the visual arts classroom: location of classroom within the school, architectural layout of school, comparison of visual arts classroom space to other spaces

Interviews based on photographs of space taken by the researcher and students

### **Operational curriculum**

Observation of classroom events

Informal interviews with teachers and students to assure accuracy of observations and to obtain emic perspectives

### **Pedagogy**

Observation of classroom events with a focus on teachers' actions

Interviews with teachers for clarification and explanation of events observed

Interviews based on photographs related to pedagogy taken by the researcher and students

### **Evaluation**

Observation of teachers' comments on student work, interactions, and behaviors

Observation of students' comments on teacher and student work, interactions, and behaviors

Collection of written evaluations by teachers and students (school administrators as needed)

### **Aesthetics**

Observation of the materials, colors, textures, and other aesthetic properties used in the classroom

Observation of the materials, colors, textures, and other aesthetic properties used by the students in their work

Interviews with select teachers and students regarding their views on the aesthetics of the classroom environment (including photograph-based interviews)

## Appendix B: Dimensions of Creativity

*Below are the dimensions of creativity that were observed for this study. Beneath the dimensions are the ways in which information was secured. The dimensions are derived by clustering Sternberg's 21 actions educators can take and attitudes teachers can adopt to nurture student creativity.*

- **Challenge assumptions and look at things in different ways**
- **Encourage student confidence to take risks**
- **Nurture a passion for exploration**
- **Set creativity as a curricular priority**

### **Creativity clusters based on Sternberg's 21 actions and attitudes**

#### *Challenge assumptions and look at things in different ways*

- redefine the problem
- question and analyze assumptions
- recognize that knowledge is a double-edged sword and act accordingly
- encourage tolerance of ambiguity
- teach children to imagine things from others' points of view
- encourage idea generation

#### *Encourage student confidence to take risks*

- encourage children to identify and surmount obstacles
- encourage sensible risk-taking
- help children build self-efficacy
- teach children the importance of delaying gratification
- allow mistakes
- teach children to take responsibility for both successes and failures

#### *Nurture a passion for exploration*

- help children find what they love to do
- cross-fertilize ideas
- encourage creative collaboration
- maximize person-environment fit

#### *Set creativity as a curricular priority*

- model creativity
- allow time for creative thinking
- instruct and assess for creativity
- reward creativity
- do not assume creative ideas sell themselves, sell them

## Appendix C: Components of Caring

*Below are the components of caring that were observed for this study. Beneath the dimensions are the ways in which information was secured.*

### **Four Major Components of Caring**

**Modeling:** "...vital in caring...we have to show how to care in our own relations with cared-for's" (Noddings, 1992, p. 22).

- Observation of classroom events with a focus on teachers' actions
- Observation of teachers' comments on student work, interactions, and behaviors
- Collection of written documents (e.g., classroom rules/guidelines, written comments to students, evaluations)
- Interviews with select students
- Informal interviews/discussions with broader range of students

**Dialogue:** "Dialogue is open-ended; that is, in a genuine dialogue, neither party knows at the outset what the outcome or decision will be...It gives learners opportunities to question 'why'" (p. 23).

- Observation of classroom events and communications with a focus on teachers' actions
- Interviews with teachers and select students about observations to assure accuracy thereof (including photograph-based interviews as relevant)
- Informal interviews/discussions with broader range of students

**Practice:** Opportunities for students to "gain skills in caregiving and, more important, to develop the characteristic attitudes [of caring]" (pp. 23-24).

- Observation of classroom events and communications focusing on teacher and students actions
- Collection of written documents by teachers and students (e.g., classroom rules/guidelines, written comments to students, written work by students, evaluations of students and teachers)
- Interviews with teachers and select students about observations to assure accuracy thereof (including photograph-based interviews as relevant)
- Informal interviews/discussions with broader range of students

**Confirmation:** Cannot be "done by formula" (p. 25). "When we confirm someone, we spot a better self and encourage its development...Confirmation requires attribution of the best possible motive consonant with reality" (p. 25).

- Observation of classroom events and communications focusing on teacher and students actions
- Interviews with teachers and select students about observations to assure accuracy thereof (including photograph-based interviews as relevant)
- Informal interviews/discussions with broader range of students

## Appendix C (continued)

Detailed elements of care that were attended to during observations and data collection:

### **Noddings**

1. Care for self: physical, spiritual, and recreational life
2. Care for the inner circle
  - *Equal relations*: friends (want good things for friends), colleagues and neighbors (non-competitive when cooperation is better; healthy competition that is fun, brings delight, and leads to better products)
  - *Unequal relations*: close student/teacher relationships; teachers understand student world views and help shape their views; teachers understand unequal nature of relations with students; students learn how to allow teachers to care for them; children feel safe in unequal relations; students can communicate their needs and are encouraged to do so; students realize their impact on the teacher's behavior (Noddings, 1992, pp. 107-108). Parent-child unequal relationship
3. Additional relevant centers of care: care for the Earth; care for the human-made world; care for ideas

### **Culturally Reponsive Pedagogy**

Aspects of care:

- "Patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and empowerment for the participants" (Gay, 2000, p. 47)
- Students are pushed to succeed when engaging in meaningful and challenging learning. (Kleinfeld as cited in Gay, 2000, p. 50)
- Believing that all students have talents and strengths and "providing a feeling of belonging for all members and creating a sense of mutual responsibility within the group" (Nieto, 1999, p. 99)
- "Ongoing examination of who we are in our full humanity, embracing all of our identities, creates the possibility of building alliances that may ultimately free us all" (Tatum, 1997, p. 28)
- Humanizing pedagogy concepts as applied to Chicano/Mexicano students (Salazar, 2008)

### **Feminist Literature**

- Opportunity for students to define themselves within relationships and on their ability to care (Gilligan, 1982). Emphasis on 'the ethos of care' (working relationally to make and keep human connections and avoid damage)" (Gilligan as quoted in Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 209)
- Broad perspective avoiding stereotypical concepts of feminist ideals (Thompson, 2003)

## Appendix D: Preliminary Teacher Questionnaire

### Conducted online via “Survey Monkey”

*Teachers were asked to select which response best reflected their classroom and teaching style on the following scale:*

1	2	3	4
Strongly	Disagree	Agree	Strongly
Disagree			Agree

1. The physical environment in my classroom encourages movement.
2. Mistakes are opportunities.
3. Helping students master technical skills is an important part of my job.
4. I know something personal about each of my students.
5. I often hear students laughing in my class
6. Students help each other and the teacher.
7. Students come into my classroom even when they don't have class.
8. I hear students providing constructive feedback to each other on a regular basis.
9. Teaching energizes me.
10. No two end-products of the students look alike, despite starting with the same choice of materials.
11. Brainstorming by students is encouraged.
12. Students talk about outside events in their lives during class.
13. I immediately address negative comments when I hear them (e.g., put downs of others or self)
14. I provide opportunities for students to bring their cultural backgrounds into the class.
15. I alter my teaching style when working with different students.
16. I address all of the senses in my teaching.

*Teachers were also asked to briefly answer the following questions in a short answer narrative.*

1. How do you define creativity?
2. How do you use creativity in your classroom?
3. What does caring mean to you? How do you act in caring ways in your classroom?
4. What do you hope to gain by participating in a study on creativity and caring in visual arts classrooms?

## **Appendix E: Teacher Interview Guide**

### **General**

1. Could you tell me a little bit about this class?
  - How students relate to each other
  - How the teacher relates to the students
  - How the class compares to others the teacher has taught
  - Personality/dynamic of the class
2. How would you describe the students?
  - Interest level in art
  - Goals and aims of students
  - Performance – who's doing well; who's not doing well
  - Challenges students may face/assets they may have
3. What are the backgrounds of the students? (SES, ethnicity, religious, family relations, community relations)
4. We are going to be talking about caring and creativity throughout the interview. How would you define caring? How would you define creativity?

### **Intentional: aims and goals**

1. What kinds of things do you think students should be getting out of the visual arts class?
  - Skills
  - Relationships
  - Personal and moral development
  - Personal fulfillment
2. Do you have goals that you set for the students? What are they?
  - Formal versus informal
  - Dictated by school or not
  - Caring and creative elements?
3. What are your intentions for your students?
  - Do beliefs about caring play a role in those intentions?
  - Do beliefs about creativity play a role in those intentions?
  - If so, why, and if not, why not?
  - Do you see any connection between the two?
4. Do you make your intentions clear to your students? If so, why? If not, why not?
  - How do students respond when you discuss caring?
  - How do students respond when you discuss creativity?
5. Do you feel comfortable expressing your views on caring in your professional life? Creativity?
  - Do your colleagues ever ask you about your views on caring? Creativity?
  - Have your views on caring ever clashed with your professional responsibilities? Creativity?

**School structure**

1. Can you describe for me how time affects your classes and the work you do with the students?

- Individual periods
- Number of days throughout the year
- Number of years spent with different students
- Usage of time outside of school time
- Impact of overall use of time by the entire school

2. Tell me about your classroom environment.

- Do you have your own classroom?
- What do you attend to most in the physical environment

**Aesthetics**

1. Can you tell me something about the materials you choose to decorate? (Will talk about specifics – e.g., are there couches, soft materials, hard materials, varied art, instructive posters, artistic posters, plants, etc.)

2. Can you tell me something about the materials you have the students use for their projects? (Financial issues?)

**Operational**

1. Do you think that your beliefs affect your practice? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

2. How do you decide what to teach?

3. How do you work caring into your planning and execution of lessons? Creativity?

- Formal and informal methods
- What actions are indicative?

**Pedagogical**

1. Looking at the classroom, was today a typical day? (Ask about specifics)

2. Do you engage with students outside of class? How? Why? Impact?

3. How would you describe yourself as a teacher?

**Evaluative**

1. How are students evaluated? (work product, relations with others, effort, creativity, attitude)

2. Who evaluates you? Do evaluations impact what you do? (inside and outside of class)

- Students? How? At who's prompting?
- Administrators?

Do you have anything else you would like to add?



## **Appendix F: Student Interview Guide**

### **General**

1. Could you tell me a little bit about this class?
  - How students relate to each other
  - How the teacher relates to the students
  - Personality/dynamic of the class
2. How would you describe the students?
  - Interest level in art
  - Goals and aims of students
  - Performance – who's doing well; who's not doing well
  - Challenges students may face/assets they may have
3. How would you describe the teacher?
4. We are going to be talking about caring and creativity throughout the interview. How would you define caring? How would you define creativity?

### **Intentional: aims and goals**

1. What kinds of things do you think students should be getting out of the visual arts class?
2. Do you believe the teacher sets goals for the students? What are they?
3. Would you describe your teacher as caring? How do you know?

### **School structure**

1. Can you describe for me how time affects your experience with art class?
2. Tell me about your visual arts classroom environment. How does it compare to other classes?

### **Aesthetics**

1. Can you tell me something about the materials used in decorating the classroom? Does this matter to you? If so how, if not, why not?
2. What kinds of materials do you work with in class? Do the types of materials affect your work? How so?

### **Operational**

1. Do you think the teacher cares about how the students treat each other? How can you tell?
2. Is your teacher creative? How can you tell? Does he/she encourage you to be creative? How?

### **Pedagogical**

1. Looking at the classroom, was today a typical day? (Ask about specifics)
2. Do you engage with other art students or the teacher outside of class? How? Why? Impact?
3. How does your teacher teach? Does it affect you in any way?

**Evaluative**

1. How are you evaluated?
  - Work product
  - Relations with others
  - Effort
  - Creativity
  - Attitude
2. Do you evaluate the teacher? How?

***Have students show and talk about photographs***

Do you have anything else you would like to add?

## Appendix G: Institution Informed Consent Form

### Institution/School Consent to Participate Form

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM: *Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms Study*

**An Invitation:** You are invited to participate on the impact of creative and caring visual arts classrooms. This study is about the intentions of the teachers and the experiences of students in classrooms selected for the study. I am asking you to decide if you would like to participate in the study.

The “Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms” study is being conducted by Juli Kramer, M.A., a graduate student in the Curriculum and Instruction program in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. She is supervised by P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D., Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of the intentions and actions of teachers who believe that caring and creative environments are essential for visual arts instruction. I would like to determine the impact on student self-concepts and holistic development.

**Description of the Study:** If you agree to participate, the following is how the study will impact your students, teachers, and school:

#### *Student Participants*

Participation for students selected for the study will involve responding to a number of questions about the impact of their learning experiences in the visual arts classroom and demographic information including: age, gender, ethnicity; learning how to use a digital camera to take pictures for a photo essay; and responding to questions about their photographs and observations of the researcher. Students will also participate in a follow-up interview to review the research findings.

#### *Teacher Participants*

Participation for the teachers will involve responding to a number of questions about their teaching intentions and practice, prior to and after classroom observations. Teachers will also be observed during their visual arts classes for one to two school weeks. Data collection will include observation data collected by Ms. Kramer. Teachers will also participate in a follow-up interview to review the research findings.

#### *School Participants*

Participation for schools will involve distribution and collection of consent forms from participant students and their parents. You will authorize the researcher from the University of Denver to observe one visual arts teacher for one to two school weeks. The researcher will take notes on her laptop regarding her observations and may take photographs to support those observations. You will assist the researcher in collecting any documents such as teacher evaluations, parent feedback, or similar artifacts that may clarify and support the observations.

**Potential Risks:** The risks of this study appear to be minimal outside of those normally encountered in the art classroom setting. They include feeling concerned about how the information from the study will be used, as well as sensitivity to who is going to read the study, what it will say, and who will view the website.

#### *Student Participants*

Some of the questions involved personal information about students’ feelings about the curriculum and their experiences within and as a result of the visual arts classes in which they participate. Some student might find these questions uncomfortable. You students will have the right to skip questions, withdraw

from participation in taking photographs and being interviewed, and/or drop out of the study at any time for any reason without consequence.

#### *Teacher Participants*

Some of the questions involved personal information involving the teachers' feelings about the classroom and school environment, curriculum, intentions, and teaching practices. Some teachers might find these questions to be uncomfortable. They have the right to skip questions, withdraw from being interviewed, and/or drop out of the study at any time for any reason without consequence.

#### **Potential Benefits:**

##### *Student Participants*

Student participants may benefit from this study by sharing their opinions and insights into one aspect of their educational experience. They may also benefit by knowing that their opinions are valued and can help improve visual arts education specifically and other educational environments in general. They will also have the opportunity to learn how to operate digital cameras if they have not already had the chance to do so. Reflecting on their learning experiences in the visual arts classes being studied may help continue to engage them in school.

##### *Teacher Participants*

Teacher participants may benefit from this study by learning more about the impact of their teaching philosophy and practice on students. They may also learn more about reflecting on their own teaching by participating in the study. The potential knowledge by this study clearly outweighs the potential risks that could be experienced by the participants.

**Confidentiality:** The answers provided by participants to interview questions and data gathered during observations are private and confidential and will be used for research and educational purposes only. Group results and general trends will be reported and pseudonyms will be used in all research reports that participants cannot be identified. There are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. If information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse or neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

**Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, participants have the right to skip questions they do not want to answer; withdraw from the photographic essays; and/or withdraw from the study at any time.

**Future Questions and Concerns:** If you have any questions about this study or your rights, you may contact either Juli Kramer at 720-352-9347 or [jkramer2@du.edu](mailto:jkramer2@du.edu), or P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D. at 303-871-2483 or [buhrmach@du.edu](mailto:buhrmach@du.edu). If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the study, please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454 or Sylk Soto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd. Denver, CO 80208-2121.

#### **Consent to Participate in the Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms Study**

**Consent:** I have read and understood the foregoing description of the Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms Study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I do not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that teacher and/or student participants may skip interview questions; withdraw from the photographic essays; and/or withdraw from the study at any time, and I may withdraw my consent at any time. I understand that there are two

exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. If information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse or neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

I have received a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number

I would like a summary of the research findings

\_\_\_\_\_  
Yes

\_\_\_\_\_  
No

**This consent form was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on March 10, 2009.**

## Appendix H: Teacher Informed Consent Form

### Teacher Consent Form

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM: *Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms Study*

**An Invitation:** You are invited to participate on the impact of creative and caring visual arts classrooms. This study is about the intentions of the teachers and the experiences of students in classrooms selected for the study. I am asking you to decide if you would like to participate in the study.

The “Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms” study is being conducted by Juli Kramer, M.A., a graduate student in the Curriculum and Instruction program in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. She is supervised by P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D., Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of the intentions and actions of teachers who believe that caring and creative environments are essential for visual arts instruction. I would like to determine the impact on student self-concepts and holistic development.

**Description of the Study:** If you agree to participate, the following is how the study will impact your students, teachers, and school:

#### *Student Participants*

Participation for students selected for the study will involve responding to a number of questions about the impact of their learning experiences in the visual arts classroom and demographic information including: age, gender, ethnicity; learning how to use a digital camera to take pictures for a photo essay; and responding to questions about their photographs and observations of the researcher. Students will also participate in a follow-up interview to review the research findings.

#### *Teacher Participants*

Participation for the teachers will involve responding to a number of questions about their teaching intentions and practice, prior to and after classroom observations. Teachers will also be observed during their visual arts classes for one to two school weeks. Data collection will include observation data collected by Ms. Kramer. Teachers will also participate in a follow-up interview to review the research findings.

#### *School Participants*

Participation for schools will involve distribution and collection of consent forms from participant students and their parents. You will authorize the researcher from the University of Denver to observe one visual arts teacher for one to two school weeks. The researcher will take notes on her laptop regarding her observations and may take photographs to support those observations. You will assist the researcher in collecting any documents such as teacher evaluations, parent feedback, or similar artifacts that may clarify and support the observations.

**Potential Risks:** The risks of this study appear to be minimal outside of those normally encountered in the art classroom setting. They include feeling concerned about how the information from the study will be used, as well as sensitivity to who is going to read the study, what it will say, and who will view the website.

#### *Student Participants*

Some of the questions involved personal information about students’ feelings about the curriculum and their experiences within and as a result of the visual arts classes in which they participate. Some student might find these questions uncomfortable. You students will have the right to skip questions, withdraw

from participation in taking photographs and being interviewed, and/or drop out of the study at any time for any reason without consequence.

#### *Teacher Participants*

Some of the questions involved personal information involving your feelings about the classroom and school environment, curriculum, intentions, and teaching practices. You might find these questions to be uncomfortable. You have the right to skip questions, withdraw from being interviewed, and/or drop out of the study at any time for any reason without consequence.

#### **Potential Benefits:**

##### *Student Participants*

Student participants may benefit from this study by sharing their opinions and insights into one aspect of their educational experience. They may also benefit by knowing that their opinions are valued and can help improve visual arts education specifically and other educational environments in general. They will also have the opportunity to learn how to operate digital cameras if they have not already had the chance to do so. Reflecting on their learning experiences in the visual arts classes being studied may help continue to engage them in school.

##### *Teacher Participants*

You may benefit from this study by learning more about the impact of your teaching philosophy and practice on students. You may also learn more about reflecting on your own teaching by participating in the study. The potential knowledge by this study clearly outweighs the potential risks that could be experienced.

**Confidentiality:** The answers provided by you to interview questions and data gathered during observations are private and confidential and will be used for research and educational purposes only. Group results and general trends will be reported and pseudonyms will be used in all research reports that participants cannot be identified. There are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. If information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse or neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

**Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, participants have the right to skip questions they do not want to answer; withdraw from the photographic essays; and/or withdraw from the study at any time.

**Future Questions and Concerns:** If you have any questions about this study or your rights, you may contact either Juli Kramer at 720-352-9347 or [jkramer2@du.edu](mailto:jkramer2@du.edu), or P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D. at 303-871-2483 or [buhrmach@du.edu](mailto:buhrmach@du.edu). If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the study, please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454 or Sylk Soto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd. Denver, CO 80208-2121.

#### **Consent to Participate in the Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms Study**

**Consent:** I have read and understood the foregoing description of the Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms Study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I do not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that teacher and/or student participants may skip interview questions; withdraw from the photographic essays; and/or withdraw from the study at any time, and I may withdraw my consent at any time. I understand that there are two

exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. If information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse or neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

I have received a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number

I would like a summary of the research findings

\_\_\_\_\_  
Yes

\_\_\_\_\_  
No

### **Media Waiver and Release**

#### *Teacher Media Waiver & Release*

I consent to being photographed and interviewed by a representative of the University of Denver. Any information or images obtained from those activities may be reproduced by the University for use in educational activities, including but not limited to University publications, print, and web-based educational environments. I hereby waive any claims I may have, and release the University and its employees from liability of claims arising out of such activities.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**This consent form was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on March 10, 2009.**



## Appendix I: Parent Informed Consent Form

### Parent Consent

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM: *Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms Study*

**An Invitation:** You are invited to participate on the impact of creative and caring visual arts classrooms. This study is about the intentions of the teachers and the experiences of students in classrooms selected for the study. I am asking you to decide if you would like to participate in the study.

The “Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms” study is being conducted by Juli Kramer, M.A., a graduate student in the Curriculum and Instruction program in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. She is supervised by P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D., Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of the intentions and actions of teachers who believe that caring and creative environments are essential for visual arts instruction. I would like to determine the impact on student self-concepts and holistic development.

**Description of the Study:** If you agree to allow your student to participate, the researcher will: ask your student to respond to a number of questions about the impact of their learning experiences in the visual arts classroom and about demographic information including: age, gender, ethnicity; with your student’s approval, teach him/her how to use a digital camera and ask them to take pictures for a photo essay; and ask your student to respond to questions about their photographs and observations of the researcher. Your student will also be asked to participate in a follow-up interview to review the research findings.

**Potential Risks:** The risks of this study appear to be minimal outside of those normally encountered in the art classroom setting. They include feeling concerned about how the information from the study will be used, as well as sensitivity to who is going to read the study, what it will say, and who will view the website. Some of the questions involved personal information about students’ feelings about the curriculum and their experiences within and as a result of the visual arts classes in which they participate. Some student might find these questions uncomfortable. You students will have the right to skip questions, withdraw from participation in taking photographs and being interviewed, and/or drop out of the study at any time for any reason without consequence.

**Potential Benefits:** Student participants may benefit from this study by sharing their opinions and insights into one aspect of their educational experience. They may also benefit by knowing that their opinions are valued and can help improve visual arts education specifically and other educational environments in general. They will also have the opportunity to learn how to operate digital cameras if they have not already had the chance to do so. Reflecting on their learning experiences in the visual arts classes being studied may help continue to engage them in school.

When the study is finished, if you like, you will be sent a letter reporting the results. Because all of the answers are private, you will not get individual feedback about your student’s thoughts and feelings, but will be told about the overall findings.

**Confidentiality:** The answers provided by student participants to interview questions and data gathered during observations are private and confidential and will be used for research and educational purposes only. Group results and general trends will be reported and pseudonyms will be used in all research reports that participants cannot be identified. There are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. If information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse or neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the

subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

**Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw:** Your student's participation in this study is voluntary. Your student has the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, your student has the right to skip questions they do not want to answer and/or withdraw from the photographic essays. You have the right to withdraw consent for your student's participation at any time.

**Future Questions and Concerns:** If you have any questions about this study or your rights, you may contact either Juli Kramer at 720-352-9347 or [jkramer2@du.edu](mailto:jkramer2@du.edu), or P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D. at 303-871-2483 or [buhmach@du.edu](mailto:buhmach@du.edu). If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the study, please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454 or Sylk Soto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd. Denver, CO 80208-2121.

### **Consent to Participate in the Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms Study**

**Consent:** I have read and understood the foregoing description of the Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms Study. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I do not fully understand. I agree to allow my child to participate in this study, and I understand that he/she may skip interview questions; withdraw from the photographic essays; and/or withdraw his/her consent at any time, and that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I understand that there are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. If information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse or neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

I have received a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number

I would like a summary of the research findings

\_\_\_\_\_  
Yes

\_\_\_\_\_  
No

#### *Student Media Waiver & Release*

I consent to my child being photographed and interviewed by a representative of the University of Denver. Any information or images obtained from those activities may be reproduced by the University for use in educational activities, including but not limited to University publications, print, and web-based educational environments. I hereby waive any claims I may have, and release the University and its employees from liability of claims arising out of such activities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, my child may be photographed or interviewed for educational use.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, my child may not be photographed or interviewed for educational use.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's or Guardian's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**This consent form was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on March 10, 2009.**

## Appendix J: Minor Assent Form

### STUDENT ASSENT FORM: *Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms Study*

**An Invitation:** My name is Juli Kramer. I am a graduate student in the Curriculum and Instruction program in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. My supervisor's name is P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D., Department of Curriculum and Instruction. I am conducting a study on "Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classrooms" to understand how your visual arts classroom impacts you: your experience in school, art class, and your life in general. I am asking you to decide if you would like to participate in the study.

**Description of the Study:** If you agree to participate I will ask you to respond to a number of questions about your learning experiences in the visual arts classroom. I will also ask for demographic information including: age, gender, and ethnicity. As part of the study, you will learn how to use a digital camera and take pictures for a photo essay; I will ask you questions about your photographs and other things that I might observe. I will also ask you to participate in a follow-up interview, once I have completed a summary of the research.

**Potential Risks:** The risks of this study appear to be minimal outside of those normally encountered in your art classroom setting. You might feel concerned about how the information from the study will be used, as well as sensitivity to who is going to read the study, what it will say, and who will view a website presenting the findings. Some of the questions involve personal information about your feelings about the curriculum and your experiences in class. You might find these questions uncomfortable. You will have the right to skip questions, withdraw from taking photographs, and/or drop out of the study at any time for any reason without consequence.

**Potential Benefits:** You may benefit from this study by sharing your opinions and insights into part of your educational experience. You may also benefit by knowing that your opinions are valued and can help improve visual arts education specifically and other classes in general. You will also have the opportunity to learn how to operate a digital camera if you have not already had the chance to do so. When the study is finished, if you like, you will be sent a letter reporting the results. Because all of the answers are private, you will not get individual feedback about your thoughts and feelings, but I will write about the overall findings.

**Confidentiality:** The answers provided by you to interview questions and observations are private and confidential and will be used for research and educational purposes only. I will report for the group, and you will not be identified. There are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. If you are planning to hurt yourself or if someone is hurting you, I will get help for you from the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

**Future Questions and Concerns:** If you have any questions about this study or your rights, you may contact either Juli Kramer at 720-352-9347 or [jkramer2@du.edu](mailto:jkramer2@du.edu), or P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D. at 303-871-2483 or [buhrmach@du.edu](mailto:buhrmach@du.edu). If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the study, please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454 or Sylk Soto-Santiago, Office of Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd. Denver, CO 80208-2121.

**Student Assent:** I have been told about the purpose of the Creative and Caring Visual Arts Classroom study. I understand that if I agree to be part of this study I will be asked to participate in two formal interviews about my experiences in my visual arts class. I will also be asked to learn how to use a digital

camera and take photographs for a photo essay about my experiences with the visual arts class. I know that I don't have to participate in the study, that I can drop out at any time for any reason, and that I can skip interview questions if I do not want to answer them, and/or withdraw from participation in the photo essay part of the study at any time. I understand that my answers will be kept private. I understand that some of the photographs I take may be used in the final written and web-based reports. I understand that the researcher from the University of Denver will observe several of my visual arts classes. I understand that there are two exceptions to the promise of confidentiality. If I am planning to hurt myself or if someone is hurting me, the researcher will get help for me from the proper authorities. In addition, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena.

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Student's Signature

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Date

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Printed Name

**This assent form was approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research on March 10, 2009.**

### Appendix K: Demographic Summary

<b>Name of School</b>	Clayton	Palomino	Peak	Camden	St. Anne's	Madison
<b>Teacher</b>	Mr. Cole	Ms. Carter	Ms. Scott	Ms. Winter	Ms. Madison	Ms. Meyers
<b>Location</b>	Urban CO	Suburban CO	Rural CO	Rural WA	Suburban WA	Suburban WA
<b># of Students</b>	1428	2100	441	213	≈1000	841
	9th-12th	9th-12th	9th-12th	Years 1-12	Years 1-12	Years 11-12
Anglo	19%	85.5%	89%	<i>See *Note</i>		
Hispanic	73%	8%	10%			
African American	3%	3%	0.003%			
American Indian	0.02%	0.005%	0.01%			
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.007%	3%	0.02%			
Aboriginal	NM	NM	NM	unavailable	unavailable	0.003%
Free/Reduced Lunch	74.2%	4.1%	12.1%			
Drop-out Rate	10.2%	0.8%	2.1%			
Language other than English	21%	4.1%	2%			
Enrollment Stability	92.1%	95.6%	95.5%			
Overall Academic Assessment	Low	High	High			
Growth (student improvement)	Low	Low	Low			
<b>*Note:</b> Demographic data was not maintained in Western Australia in the same way as in Colorado.						
<b>Key:</b>						
CO = Colorado						
WA = Western Australia						
NM = Not available						

### Appendix L: Teacher and Student Summary

<b>Colorado</b>			
<b>Name of Teacher</b>	<b>Mr. Cole</b>	<b>Ms. Carter</b>	<b>Ms. Scott</b>
<b>Days Observed</b>	10	10	8
<b>Classes Observed</b>	AP Studio/Photo	Ceramics 2	3D Art
	Photo 2/3	Ceramics 1	Advanced 2D Art
	Photo 1	Ceramics 3/4	Photography
		Ceramics 2	2D Art
			2D Art
			3D Art
<b>Students</b>	Dana/Photo 2/3	Anna/C3-4, TA	Alexa/Adv. 2D
	Daniel/AP Studio	Kira/C2	Bethany/Adv. 2D
	Federico/ AP Studio	Matthew/C2	Kacy/3D
	Maya/AP Photo, Photo 2/3	Wes/C2	Mark/Adv. 2D
	Nina/ AP Photo		Tyler/3D & Photo
<b>Australia</b>			
<b>Name of Teacher</b>	<b>Ms. Wright</b>	<b>Ms. Madison</b>	<b>Ms. Meyers</b>
<b>Day Observed</b>	6	6	5
<b>Classes Observed</b>	Year 10 Art	Year 6(1) Art	Cert. Year 11/TAFE Year 12 (Green)
	Year 12 Art TEE/Cert.	Year 7(1) Art	Cert. Year 11/TAFE Year 12 (Blue)
	Year 11 1A Art	Year 7(2) Art	
	Year 11 2A Art		
	(1A = easier; 2A = middle; 3A = advanced)		
<b>Students</b>	Aaron/year 12 TEE	Heather/year 7	Brenda/TAFE
	Elizabeth/year 12 TEE	Patty/year 6	Kegan/TAFE
	Erin/year 12 TEE	Sarah/year 6	Kristin/Cert. II
		Tina/year 7	Logan/TAFE